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# METHODS AND AIMS IN THE STUDY OF LITERATURE

## A SERIES OF EXTRACTS AND ILLUSTRATIONS

ARRANGED AND ADAPTED
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IN CORNELL UNIVERSITY

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# PREFACE

For this volume I have adopted the title of a privately issued pamphlet, *Methods and Aims in the Study of Literature*, which I have found useful to various classes in English, but in particular to one in the theory of poetry. The pamphlet consisted of a few selections, beginning with what is now fourth in the second section, and primarily drawn from Coleridge and Wordsworth, with additional illustrations from Milton, Dante, and Plato; virtually all these extracts are here included in the second, third, and sixth sections. The smaller collection was designed to free the student of poetry, at the outset, from common errors as to the nature of genius — errors that interfere with his understanding of the poets themselves, and with his appreciation of whatever formal treatise (the *Poetics* of Aristotle, say, or the *Ars Poetica* of Horace) he happens first to take up. I hope that the larger collection will render a more positive service, if only by way of suggesting that the Platonic conception of the artistic regulation of impulse still retains its validity.

With systematic works on method my volume obviously enters into no competition.

If evidence in the poets themselves respecting their habits of study and production ought in some measure to guide us in studying and reproducing their thoughts and emotions, it must be said that such evidence, though there

is really no lack of it, is neither easy to find nor easily arranged. I have included several extracts from a mere wish to have them together for ease of reference and comparison. Yet the thought that gives unity to the whole is not, I hope, too much overlaid, being more than once clearly expressed by authors who are quoted — for example, by Browning (p. 187), where he speaks of the marriage of law and impulse in the work of the great Creative Artist. And the gradual progress of the selections, from those that insist upon the necessity of law and order in poetic art to those that insist upon the necessity of emotion, must be evident; though I am aware that the extract from Reynolds (pp. 16–17), and those from Boeckh (pp. 45–46, 49–52), being essentially Platonic, would not lose if they were brought closer to one from the *Symposium* (pp. 220–222). At all events, I trust the reader will find correspondences between one part and another, and, in spite of occasional interruption and discrepancy, a general corroboration of opinion and experience throughout.

The main course of the selections is as follows: First, under a single heading, come those on method in general; those on the relation of scientific to artistic method; those on method in arts other than literature; one on the method of observation and comparison in natural science, where the procedure is fundamentally the same as that employed in the study of literature; and one on the life of a scholar who fully understood this basic truth. Then, under a second heading, come those on observation and comparison in literature, and, under a third, supplementary to these, the extracts from Wordsworth's letters. The fourth section, illustrating the practice

of poets and others in composing, naturally follows these letters, and leads up to the fifth, on the studies of poets. As a final illustration of the bond between rigorous method and the artistic utterance of passion, I could hardly avoid choosing for the sixth section the treatment of the supreme passion of love by (in the main) supreme poets. And I have ventured in all humility to close with a passage from Scripture that seems to gain added significance in the new setting, while it puts the final emphasis where the final emphasis in the study of literature and of life belongs.

It only remains for me to record my thanks and acknowledgments to several authors and publishers who have kindly allowed me to make use of various selections: to Houghton Mifflin Company for the extracts from Palmer's *Herbert* and Allen's review of it, and for those from Shaler's *Autobiography* and Norton's translation of the *Vita Nuova*;[1] to Mr. Kenyon Cox and Charles Scribner's Sons for several paragraphs from *The Classic Point of View*; to Longmans, Green, & Co. for an extract from Professor Albert S. Cook's edition of Burke's *Speech on Conciliation*; to the editors of *Modern Language Notes* for permission to reprint my article entitled *A Glance at Wordsworth's Reading*, and to them and to Professor Laura E. Lockwood for her article on *Milton's Corrections*; to Harper and Brothers and William Blackwood and Sons for Minto's essay, *The Historical*

[1] The selections from *The Autobiography of Nathaniel S. Shaler* and C. E. Norton's *The New Life of Dante* are used by permission of, and by special arrangement with, Houghton Mifflin Company, authorized publishers of their works.

*Relationships of Burns*; to Dr. Ida Langdon for the passage from *Materials for the Study of Spenser's Theory of Fine Art*; and to Professor Justin H. Smith for extracts from *The Troubadours at Home*. The selections from Jowett's translation of Plato are reprinted with the consent of the holders of the copyright. Two definitions of 'art' on page 2 are borrowed from *The Artistic Ordering of Life* by Professor Cook; I am also indebted to him for the passage from Shedd on *The Meaning of Methodology*, and for the extract entitled *Byron's Early Reading*. Aside from these instances, I hope I have in the footnotes given proper credit in all cases where credit is due. A few trifling errors, infelicities in punctuation, and the like, I have silently corrected or emended; but it has seemed undesirable, if not impossible, to normalize all the selections in all respects.

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# CONTENTS


PAGE

I. On Method in General . . . . . 1

I. Milton on Discipline . . . . . 1
II. Art equals Method . . . . . 2
III. John Burnet on Aristotle and Method . . . . 2
IV. Shedd on Methodology . . . . . 4
V. Herbert Spencer on the Relation of Art to Science 8
VI. Leonardo da Vinci on Method in the Art of Painting 14
VII. Sir Joshua Reynolds on Method . . . . . 16
VIII. Kenyon Cox on Design in Painting . . . . . 18
IX. Sir Frederick Pollock on Personality and Method . 26
X. Shaler on the Method of Agassiz . . . . . 27
XI. The Method of John Sherren Brewer . . . . . 34

II. On Method in the Study of Literature . . . 44

I. Leigh Hunt on Reconstructing the Spirit of the Past 44
II. August Boeckh on Interpretation and Criticism as the Two Distinct Functions in the Study of the Past . . . . . 45
III. Professor Cook's Adaptation of Boeckh to the Study of a Particular Masterpiece . . . . . 46
IV. Boeckh on the Relation of Encyclopaedia to Methodology . . . . . 49
V. Methods and Aims in the Study of Literature: Opinions from Two Poets . . . . . 52

III. Extracts from Letters of Wordsworth on the Study and Practice of Poetry . . . . . 57

I. Wordsworth to R. P. Gillies . . . . . 57
II. Wordsworth to William Rowan Hamilton . . . 57
III. Wordsworth to William Rowan Hamilton . . . 59
IV. Wordsworth to Lord Lonsdale . . . . . 62
V. Wordsworth to William Rowan Hamilton . . . 62

PAGE

IV. Illustrations of the Practice of Great Writers in Composing . . . . . 63

I. Professor Lockwood on Milton's Corrections of the Minor Poems . . . . . 63
II. Horace . . . . . 76
III. Ben Jonson on Shakespeare . . . . . 76
IV. Ben Jonson on Style . . . . . 77
V. Samuel Johnson . . . . . 79
VI. Rousseau . . . . . 80
VII. Gilman on Coleridge . . . . . 81
VIII. Coleridge . . . . . 81
IX. Wordsworth, as seen by his Sister . . . . . 82
X. De Quincey . . . . . 83
XI. Cardinal Newman . . . . . 84
XII. Charles Lamb . . . . . 85
XIII. Manzoni . . . . . 85
XIV. Tennyson . . . . . 86
XV. Stevenson . . . . . 87
XVI. Lafcadio Hearn . . . . . 90
XVII. Jowett . . . . . 92
XVIII. Balzac . . . . . 92

V. On the Studies of Poets . . . . . 96

I. A Glance at Wordsworth's Reading . . . . . 96
II. Minto on Robert Burns . . . . . 132
III. Byron's Early Reading . . . . . 155
IV. Spenser's Use of Books . . . . . 158
V. Shakespeare's Books . . . . . 164
VI. An Illustration of Shakespeare's Use of Books . 170
VII. Milton's Plans and Studies for *Paradise Lost* . . 171
VIII. Milton's Account of his Own Education . . . . 179

VI. Method in the Poetry of Love — with Illustrations . . . . . 187

I. Browning . . . . . 187
II. The Method of the Troubadours . . . . . 187

PAGE

III. A Method of Study suggested by the Practice of Dante . . . . . 195
IV. On the Structure of the *Vita Nuova* . . . . 198
V. Some of the Topics discussed by Dante in his Treatise *De Vulgari Eloquentia* . . . . . 203
VI. The Method of Petrarch . . . . . 204
VII. The Method of George Herbert . . . . . 208
VIII. George Herbert: *Love Unknown* . . . . . 213
IX. Socrates on the Principles of Composition . . . 216
X. The Method of Agathon in the *Symposium* of Plato . . . . . 219
XI. Diotima explains the Method of Artistic Education to Socrates . . . . . 220
XII. Wordsworth on Love and Reason . . . . . 223
XIII. The Thirteenth Chapter of First Corinthians . . 223

INDEX OF EXTRACTS AND ILLUSTRATIONS . . . 225
INDEX OF PROPER NAMES . . . . . 229

# METHODS AND AIMS IN THE STUDY OF LITERATURE

## I

## ON METHOD IN GENERAL

### I. MILTON ON DISCIPLINE

There is not that thing in the world of more grave and urgent importance, throughout the whole life of man, than is discipline. What need I instance? He that hath read with judgment of nations and commonwealths, of cities and camps, of peace and war, sea and land, will readily agree that the flourishing and decaying of all civil societies, all the moments and turnings of human occasions, are moved to and fro as upon the axle of discipline. So that whatsoever power or sway in mortal things weaker men have attributed to fortune, I durst with more confidence (the honor of Divine Providence ever saved) ascribe either to the vigor or the slackness of discipline. Nor is there any sociable perfection in this life, civil or sacred, that can be above discipline; but she is that which with her musical cords preserves and holds all the parts thereof together. . . . And certainly discipline is not only the removal of disorder, but, if any visible shape can be given to divine things, the very visible shape and image of

virtue; whereby she is not only seen in the regular gestures and motions of her heavenly paces as she walks, but also makes the harmony of her voice audible to mortal ears.[1]

## II. ART EQUALS METHOD

According to the *Standard Dictionary* (New York, 1902), Art may be defined as 'the skilful and systematic arrangement or adaptation of means for the attainment of some desired end.' With this compare Aristotle (384–322 B.C.):

'Since there is no art which is not a habit of methodical production, nor any habit of methodical production which is not an art, it follows that the definition of Art is: "A habit of production in conscious accordance with a correct method."'[2]

It is to be noted that morality may be similarly defined, thus: A habit of action in conscious accordance with a correct method.

## III. JOHN BURNET ON ARISTOTLE AND METHOD

The question of method is always vital to Aristotle, and he seems to have found his hearers very deficient in a due sense of its importance. He complains in one place that people dislike any method of exposition they are not accustomed to, and mean by intelligible no more than familiar. It is just the same as with the ancient laws, which are often childish, but have been sanctified

[1] Milton, *The Reason of Church Government* 1. 1 (*Prose Works*, Bohn Edition, 2. 441–442).

[2] *Eth. Nic.* 6. 4.

by long custom. Thus it is that some will not listen to a lecture unless it is put into mathematical form, while others demand examples and illustrations, and others again require the evidence of some poet. One class want everything put with minute exactitude; others are annoyed by precision, either because they are incapable of connected thought, or because they think it is mean and petty. There is something about it, in philosophy as well as in business, that repels them. What is wanted to remedy all this is Culture. We cannot be always looking for the method of knowledge and for knowledge itself at the same time. Neither is easy to find. It is clearly necessary, then, that we should have some preliminary training in these matters, so that we may know where we are entitled to demand mathematical precision, and where anything of the sort would be entirely out of place.

. . . In the *Protagoras* of Plato the young Hippocrates actually blushes at the suggestion that he is going to take lessons with any other view than to get that unprofessional culture which alone becomes a gentleman. It is clear, however, that Aristotle means something far more definite than this. With him the man of culture is above all things the arbiter of method. He is the judge of how much precision is fairly to be expected in any inquiry . . . and in the *Metaphysics* we are told that it shows want of culture not to know what can be demonstrated and what can not.

The clearest account of the matter, however, is to be found in a remarkable passage at the beginning of the treatise on the *Parts of Animals*. There we read that there are two ways of possessing any science, whether it be

humble or exalted, one of which may be called knowledge of the subject and the other a sort of culture. It shows culture to be able to form a right judgment instinctively as to where the speaker's exposition of a subject is methodically correct and where it is amiss. This is general culture, the power of judging all scientific method correctly.[1]

## IV. SHEDD ON METHODOLOGY

Methodology, or the science of method, is never more important, and never yields greater fruit, than when applied to historical studies. At the same time, it possesses an independent value, apart from its uses when applied to any particular subject. Treating, as it does, of the scientific mode of approaching and opening any department of knowledge, it is a species of *philosophia prima*, or philosophy of philosophy, such as Plato and Aristotle were in search of. This, in their view, was the very highest kind of science, for the reason that it is not confined to some one portion of truth, as a specific science is, but is an instrument by which truth universally may be reached. It was what they denominated an *organon* — an implement whereby the truth of any subject might be discovered. It thus resembled the science of logic. Logic does not, like philosophy or theology, enunciate any particular truths, but reaches those principles of universal reasoning by which particular truths, in these departments or any other, may be discovered and defended. If now we conceive of a science of investigation that should

[1] *The Ethics of Aristotle* (ed. John Burnet), Introduction, pp. xxxi–xxxii.

stand in the same relation to all particular investigations that logic does to reasoning generally, we shall have the conception of the science of methodology; and it is one form of that primary philosophy which Plato and Aristotle were seeking for.

In the judgment of these thinkers the *philosophia prima* was the most difficult problem that could be presented to the human mind, because it was the problem for solving all problems. It was like those general formulas which the mathematician seeks, by means of which he may resolve a great number of particular questions. They did not claim to have constructed such a *prima philosophia*, yet they none the less regarded it as the goal which should be continually kept in view by the philosopher. And they would measure the progress of philosophic thought, from age to age, by the approximation that was made towards it. Even if the goal should never be reached, still the department of philosophy would be a gainer by such a high aim. Lord Bacon himself regrets that the eye had been taken off from it, and that thinkers had confined themselves to mere parts of truth. 'Another error'—he remarks, in enumerating the 'peccant humors' of learning—'is, that after the distribution of particular arts and sciences, men have abandoned universality, or *philosophia prima*; which cannot but cease and stop all progression. For no perfect discovery can be made upon a flat or level, neither is it possible to discover the more remote and deeper parts of any science, if you stand but upon the level of the same science, and ascend not to a higher science.'[1]

[1] Bacon, *Advancement of Learning*, Book I.

The science of method seeks from this higher level to survey all the sciences, and from an elevated point of view to discover in each given instance the true mode of investigation. It is the science of the sciences, because it furnishes the philosophic clue to all of them, and stands in the same relation to the whole encyclopaedia of human inquiry that a master-key does to all the locks which it opens. Its uses are evident; for if the method, or plan of investigation, is the avenue by which the human mind makes its entrance into a subject, then upon its intrinsic adaptation to the case in hand depends the whole success of the inquiry. If the method be a truly philosophic one, the examination of the topic proceeds with ease, accuracy, and thoroughness. But if it be arbitrary and capricious, the inquirer commences with an error, which, like a mistake in the beginning of an arithmetical calculation, only repeats and multiplies itself every step of the way.

Methodology seeks in each instance to discover *the method of nature*, as that specific mode of investigation which is best fitted to elucidate a subject. By the method of nature is meant that plan which corresponds with the internal structure. Each department of human inquiry contains an interior order and arrangement which the investigator must detect, and along which he must move, in order to a thorough and symmetrical apprehension of it. The world of mind is as regular and architectural as the world of matter; and hence all branches of intellectual and moral science require for their successful prosecution the same natural and *structural* modes of investigation which a Cuvier applies to the animal kingdom, and a De Candolle to the vegetable. The method

of the anatomist is a beautiful example of the method of nature. As in anatomy the dissection follows the veins, or muscles, or nerves, or limbs, in their branchings off, so the natural method everywhere never cuts across, but along, the inward structure, following it out into its organic divisions. The science of method aids in discovering such a mode of investigation, and tends to produce in the investigator that fine mental tact by which he instinctively approaches a subject from the right point, and, like the slate quarryman, lays it open along the line of its structure and its fracture. The power of method is closely allied to the power of genius. A mind inspired by it attacks a subject with great impetuosity, and yet does not mar or mutilate it, while it penetrates into all its parts. 'I have seen Michael Angelo' — says a contemporary of that great artist — 'at work after he had passed his sixtieth year, and, although he was not very robust, he cut away as many scales from a block of very hard marble in a quarter of an hour as three young sculptors would have effected in three or four hours — a thing almost incredible to one who had not actually witnessed it. Such was the impetuosity and fire with which he pursued his labor that I almost thought the whole work must have gone to pieces; with a single stroke he brought down fragments three or four fingers thick, and so close upon his mark that had he passed it, even in the slightest degree, there would have been a danger of ruining the whole, since any such injury, unlike the case of works in plaster or stucco, would have been irreparable.'[1] Such is the bold yet safe power of a mind that works by an idea, and methodically.[2]

[1] Harford, *Life of Angelo*. [2] Shedd, *History of Christian Doctrine* I. 1–6.

## V. HERBERT SPENCER ON THE RELATION OF ART TO SCIENCE

Unexpected though the assertion may be, it is nevertheless true that the highest Art of every kind is based on Science — that without Science there can be neither perfect production nor full appreciation. Science, in that limited acceptation current in society, may not have been possessed by various artists of high repute; but, acute observers as such artists have been, they have always possessed a stock of those empirical generalizations which constitute science in its lowest phase; and they have habitually fallen far below perfection, partly because their generalizations were comparatively few and inaccurate. That science necessarily underlies the fine arts becomes manifest, a priori, when we remember that art-products are all more or less representative of objective or subjective phenomena; that they can be good only as they conform to the laws of these phenomena; and that, before they can thus conform, the artist must know what these laws are. That this a priori conclusion tallies with experience we shall soon see.

Youths preparing for the practice of sculpture have to acquaint themselves with the bones and muscles of the human frame in their distribution, attachments, and movements. This is a portion of science; and it has been found needful to impart it for the prevention of those many errors which sculptors who do not possess it commit. A knowledge of mechanical principles is also requisite; and such knowledge not being usually possessed, grave mechanical mistakes are frequently made. Take an

instance. For the stability of a figure it is needful that the perpendicular from the centre of gravity — 'the line of direction,' as it is called — should fall within the base of support; and hence it happens that when a man assumes the attitude known as 'standing at ease,' in which one leg is straightened and the other relaxed, the line of direction falls within the foot of the straightened leg. But sculptors unfamiliar with the theory of equilibrium not uncommonly so represent this attitude that the line of direction falls midway between the feet. Ignorance of the law of momentum leads to analogous blunders; as witness the admired Discobolus, which, as it is posed, must inevitably fall forward the moment the quoit is delivered.

In painting, the necessity for scientific information, empirical if not rational, is still more conspicuous. What gives the grotesqueness of Chinese pictures, unless their utter disregard of the laws of appearances — their absurd linear perspective, and their want of aërial perspective? In what are the drawings of a child so faulty, if not in a similar absence of truth — an absence arising, in great part, from ignorance of the way in which the aspects of things vary with the conditions? Do but remember the books and lectures by which students are instructed; or consider the criticisms of Ruskin; or look at the doings of the pre-Raphaelites; and you will see that progress in painting implies increasing knowledge of how effects in nature are produced. The most diligent observation, if unaided by science, fails to preserve from error. Every painter will indorse the assertion that unless it is known what appearances must exist under given circumstances,

they often will not be perceived; and to know what appearances must exist is, in so far, to understand the science of appearances. . . .

To say that music, too, has need of scientific aid will cause still more surprise. Yet it may be shown that music is but an idealization of the natural language of emotion; and that, consequently, music must be good or bad according as it conforms to the laws of this natural language. . . . But perhaps it will suffice to instance the swarms of worthless ballads that infest drawing-rooms as compositions which science would forbid. They sin against science by setting to music ideas that are not emotional enough to prompt musical expression; and they also sin against science by using musical phrases that have no natural relations to the ideas expressed — even where these are emotional. They are bad because they are untrue. And to say they are untrue is to say they are unscientific.

Even in poetry the same thing holds. . . . The entire contravention of these principles results in bombast or doggerel. . . .

Every artist, in the course of his education and after-life, accumulates a stock of maxims by which his practice is regulated. Trace such maxims to their roots, and they inevitably lead you down to psychological principles. And only when the artist understands these psychological principles and their various corollaries can he work in harmony with them.

We do not for a moment believe that science will make an artist. While we contend that the leading laws both of objective and subjective phenomena must be understood by him, we by no means contend that knowledge of such

laws will serve in place of natural perception. Not the poet only, but the artist of every type, is born, not made. What we assert is that innate faculty cannot dispense with the aid of organized knowledge. Intuition will do much, but it will not do all. Only when Genius is married to Science can the highest results be produced.

As we have above asserted, science is necessary not only for the most successful production, but also for the full appreciation, of the fine arts. In what consists the greater ability of a man than of a child to perceive the beauties of a picture, unless it is in his more extended knowledge of those truths in nature or life which the picture renders? How happens the cultivated gentleman to enjoy a fine poem so much more than a boor does, if it is not because his wider acquaintance with objects and actions enables him to see in the poem much that the boor cannot see? And if, as is here so obvious, there must be some familiarity with the things represented, before the representation can be appreciated, then the representation can be completely appreciated only when the things represented are completely understood. The fact is that every additional truth which a work of art expresses gives an additional pleasure to the percipient mind — a pleasure that is missed by those ignorant of this truth. The more realities an artist indicates in any given amount of work, the more faculties does he appeal to; the more numerous ideas does he suggest; the more gratification does he afford. But to receive this gratification the spectator, listener, or reader must know the realities which the artist has indicated; and to know the realities is to have so much science.

And now let us not overlook the further great fact that not only does science underlie sculpture, painting, music, poetry, but that science is itself poetic. The current opinion that science and poetry are opposed is a delusion. It is doubtless true that, as states of consciousness, cognition and emotion tend to exclude each other. And it is doubtless also true that an extreme activity of the reflective powers tends to deaden the feelings; while an extreme activity of the feelings tends to deaden the reflective powers — in which sense, indeed, all orders of activity are antagonistic to each other. But it is not true that the facts of science are unpoetical, or that the cultivation of science is necessarily unfriendly to the exercise of imagination and the love of the beautiful. On the contrary, science opens up realms of poetry where to the unscientific all is a blank. Those engaged in scientific researches constantly show us that they realize, not less vividly, but more vividly, than others the poetry of their subjects. Whoso will dip into Hugh Miller's works of geology, or read Mr. Lewes' *Seaside Studies*, will perceive that science excites poetry rather than extinguishes it. And he who contemplates the life of Goethe must see that the poet and the man of science can coexist in equal activity. Is it not, indeed, an absurd and almost a sacrilegious belief that the more a man studies nature the less he reveres it? Think you that a drop of water, which to the vulgar eye is but a drop of water, loses anything in the eye of a physicist who knows that its elements are held together by a force which, if suddenly liberated, would produce a flash of lightning? Think you that what is carelessly looked upon by the uninitiated as a

mere snowflake does not suggest higher associations to one who has seen through a microscope the wondrously varied and elegant forms of snow-crystals? Think you that the rounded rock marked with parallel scratches calls up as much poetry in an ignorant mind as in the mind of a geologist who knows that over this rock a glacier slid a million years ago? The truth is that those who have never entered upon scientific pursuits are blind to most of the poetry by which they are surrounded. Whoever has not in youth collected plants and insects knows not half the halo of interest which lanes and hedgerows can assume. Whoever has not sought for fossils has little idea of the poetical associations that surround the places where imbedded treasures were found. Whoever at the seaside has not had a microscope and aquarium has yet to learn what the highest pleasures of the seaside are. . . .

We find, then, that even for this remaining division of human activities, scientific culture is the proper preparation. We find that aesthetics in general are necessarily based upon scientific principles, and can be pursued with complete success only through an acquaintance with these principles. We find that for the criticism and due appreciation of works of art a knowledge of the constitution of things, or in other words a knowledge of science, is requisite. And we not only find that science is the handmaid to all forms of art and poetry, but that, rightly regarded, science is itself poetic.[1]

[1] Herbert Spencer, *What Knowledge is of most Worth?* (*Essays on Education and Kindred Subjects*, Everyman's Library, pp. 32 ff.).

## VI. LEONARDO DA VINCI ON METHOD IN THE ART OF PAINTING

The young student should, in the first place, acquire a knowledge of perspective, to enable him to give to every object its proper dimensions; after which it is requisite that he be under the care of an able master, to accustom him by degrees to a good style of drawing the parts. Next, he must study nature, in order to confirm and fix in his mind the reason of those precepts which he has learned. He must also bestow some time in viewing the works of various old masters, to form his eye and judgment, in order that he may be able to put in practice all that he has been taught.

The organ of sight is one of the quickest, and takes in at a single glance an infinite variety of forms; notwithstanding which it cannot perfectly comprehend more than one object at a time. For example, the reader, at one look over this page, immediately perceives it full of different characters; but he cannot at the same time distinguish each letter, much less can he comprehend their meaning. He must consider it word by word, and line by line, if he be desirous of forming a just notion of these characters. In like manner, if we wish to ascend to the top of an edifice, we must be content to advance step by step; otherwise we shall never be able to attain it.

A young man, who has a natural inclination to the study of this art, I would advise to act thus: In order to acquire a true notion of the form of things, he must

begin by studying the parts which compose them, and not pass to a second till he has well stored his memory, and sufficiently practised the first; otherwise he loses his time, and will most certainly protract his studies. And let him remember to acquire accuracy before he attempts quickness.

The cartilage which raises the nose in the middle of the face varies in eight different ways. It is equally straight, equally concave, or equally convex; — which is the first sort. Or, secondly, unequally straight, concave, or convex. Or, thirdly, straight in the upper part, and concave in the under. Or, fourthly, straight in the upper part, and convex in those below. Or, fifthly, it may be concave above, and straight beneath. Or, sixthly, concave above, and convex below. Or, seventhly, it may be convex in the upper part, and straight in the lower. And, in the eighth and last place, convex above, and concave beneath.

The uniting of the nose with the brows is in two ways: either it is straight, or concave. The forehead has three different forms: it is straight, concave, or round. The first is divided into two parts, viz.: it is either convex in the upper part, or in the lower — sometimes both; or else flat above and below.

Those who become enamored of the practice of the art, without having previously applied to the diligent study of the scientific part of it, may be compared to mariners who put to sea in a ship without rudder or compass, and therefore cannot be certain of arriving at the wished-for port.

Practice must always be founded on good theory; to this, perspective is the guide and entrance, without which nothing can be well done.[1]

## VII. SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS ON METHOD

Could we teach taste and genius by rules, they would be no longer taste and genius. But though there neither are, nor can be, any precise invariable rules for the exercise, or the acquisition, of these great qualities, yet we may truly say that they always operate in proportion to our attention in observing the works of nature, to our skill in selecting, and to our care in digesting, methodizing, and comparing our observations. There are many beauties in our art that seem, at first, to lie without the reach of precept, and yet may easily be reduced to practical principles. Experience is all in all; but it is not every one who profits by experience; and most people err, not so much from want of capacity to find their object, as from not knowing what object to pursue. This great ideal perfection and beauty are not to be sought in the heavens, but upon the earth. They are about us, and upon every side of us. But the power of discovering what is deformed in nature, or in other words what is particular and uncommon, can be acquired only by experience; and the whole beauty and grandeur of the art consists, in my opinion, in being able to get above all singular forms, local customs, particularities, and details of every kind.

[1] Leonardo da Vinci, *A Treatise on Painting* (tr. John Francis Rigaud), pp. 1, 2, 8, 37. London, 1877.

All the objects which are exhibited to our view by nature, upon close examination will be found to have their blemishes and defects. The most beautiful forms have something about them like weakness, minuteness, or imperfection. But it is not every eye that perceives these blemishes. It must be an eye long used to the contemplation and comparison of these forms; and which, by a long habit of observing what any set of objects of the same kind have in common, has acquired the power of discerning what each wants in particular. This long laborious comparison should be the first study of the painter who aims at the greatest style. By this means he acquires a just idea of beautiful forms; he corrects Nature by herself, her imperfect state by her more perfect. His eye being enabled to distinguish the accidental deficiencies, excrescences, and deformities of things from their general figures, he makes out an abstract idea of their forms more perfect than any one original; and, what may seem a paradox, he learns to design naturally by drawing his figures unlike to any one object. This idea of the perfect state of nature, which the artist calls the Ideal Beauty, is the great leading principle by which works of genius are conducted. By this Phidias acquired his fame. He wrought upon a sober principle what has so much excited the enthusiasm of the world.[1]

[1] Sir Joshua Reynolds, *Fifteen Discourses on Art, The Third Discourse*. Compare the extracts from Boeckh, pp. 45, 46, 49 ff., and from the *Symposium* of Plato, pp. 220 ff.

## VIII. KENYON COX ON DESIGN IN PAINTING

Perhaps the greatest weakness of modern art is the relative neglect of what is ordinarily called composition, or what I prefer to call by the good old word 'design.' The word 'composition' means, of course, the putting together of the picture, and seems to imply a more or less mechanical assemblage of separately existing parts. The word 'design' conveys the finer and truer idea of an original guiding thought, a principle of unity, out of which the parts and details of a picture are developed by a natural and organic growth. You *compose* a pudding or a black draught — you *design* a work of art. Yet the word 'composition' is a convenient one, and one so commonly understood that I shall use it interchangeably with the word 'design.'

Whatever it is to be called, that the thing itself is rather out of fashion there can be no doubt. Our tendency has been to exalt the other parts of the art of painting at the expense of this fundamental one of design, and to decry and belittle composition as a thing of small or no importance. Indeed, if one may believe all one hears, its very existence has been denied; for a well-known and justly admired American painter has been quoted as telling his pupils that 'There is no such thing as composition.' If he ever said so, one is left in doubt as to just what he can have meant. It is possible that he intended to say that there is no science of composition, and no valid rules for it — that design is, and must be, a matter of instinct and of unconscious creative action on the part of the artist. In that case, what is true in his statement is

equally true of drawing and color and handling. In all these things the business of the artist is to create, and to leave to others the task of finding out the reasons for the form of his creations. It is possible, in any art, to formulate principles to account for what has first been done — it is impossible, by the application of rules based on these principles, to create a new and vital work. This is not a reason for neglecting the study of the masterpieces of art, for ignorance was never yet creative. It is simply the statement, in another form, that the artist, however well trained, must be an artist born, and work as the artist has always worked. . . .

Whatever else was meant, it is almost inconceivable that a literal denial of the existence of composition, or design, can have been intended, for that would have been the denial to the arts of the one thing they have in common, of the one great fundamental and unifying principle that makes art art. Design is arrangement, is order, is selection. Design is the thing that makes a work of art a unit, that makes it a whole rather than a haphazard collection of unrelated things or a slice of unassimilated nature. It does not merely concern itself with great decorative compositions or arrangements of many figures — it is necessarily present in the simplest problems art can set itself. Suppose you are to paint a portrait head. There will be questions of drawing, of character and expression, of light and shade and color, of the handling of your material, to all of which you must find answers; but before you can consider any of these things, there will be the initial question: Where are you to place the head on your canvas? How far from the top and the bottom, how far

from the left- or right-hand border? And what is the shape of your canvas to be, rectangular or circular or oval, and what shall be the proportion of height to width? This is the fundamental problem of design, the problem of the division of space. . . . What is the general silhouette of your figure, and where shall it cut the borders of your canvas? That is the problem of line. If you do not settle it intentionally and well, it will settle itself accidentally, and, in all probability, badly. The problems of design are essentially the same in everything you do; they only become more complicated as the subject becomes more complex.

If you are to paint a still life, it is evident that you must arrange the objects somehow — they will not come together of themselves. You might, conceivably, begin a portrait, and wait for a happy accident — a spontaneous pose of the sitter — to give you the arrangement of the hands; you cannot wait for the copper kettle and the dead fish to place themselves agreeably. And still less can nature or accident determine your composition of a number of figures, unless you rely entirely upon snapshots. If you have any intention, any story to tell, any idea to express — if it is no more than the idea of a crowd — you *must* arrange your figures, well or ill. Even in landscape painting of the most naturalistic kind, where it is not uncommon to-day to accept what nature gives, abdicating the right to put in or leave out, and retaining only that right of choosing an agreeable view which the photographer exercises equally with the painter — even there, though you may reproduce a natural landscape as literally as you are able, you must determine where to cut it off. . . .

You cannot escape from design; you cannot avoid composing. You may compose badly, but compose you must.

And if the demands of design are fundamental, they are also universal. It is not only your lines and masses that must be composed, but your light and shade, your color, your very brush-marks must be arranged; and the task of composition is not done until the last touch has been placed upon the canvas, although, for the sake of convenience, the term 'composition,' or design, is generally limited to the arrangement of lines and masses, the arrangement of the other elements of the picture being considered separately.

As design is the underlying and unifying principle of every work of art, so it is the classic principle, par excellence, the principle which makes for order and stability and clarity, and all that the classic spirit holds most dear. It is conservative in its nature, and tends to preserve the old molds even when new matter is put into them. It holds on to tradition, and keeps up the connection with the past. It changes, but it changes more slowly than almost any other element of art. Great and original power of design is more rare than any other of the powers of an artist, and a radically new form of design is very nearly inconceivable. Artists will make a thousand new observations of nature, and almost entirely alter the contents of a work of art, before they make any but slight changes in the pattern in which it is cast; and in all the history of painting the men are but a handful who have made any material addition to the resources of the designer. If in our own day we seem to have cut loose from tradition, and to have lost our connection with the

great design of the past, it is not because we have suddenly acquired a surprising degree of designing power, and are inventing a new and modern art of composition, but because most of us have forgotten altogether how to compose, and are trying to get on without any design at all; the result being bad design and mere chaos. . . .

It [design] is, of course, founded on natural laws, — on the laws of sight, and on the laws of the human mind, — but it is only accidentally and occasionally that it is directly influenced by anything outside itself. The naturalistic temper will, as it has done at various times, lead to the neglect of composition; it will not lead to new discoveries in composition. The study of anatomy revolutionized and greatly enriched the drawing of the human figure; the study of natural light and color has added something to the resources of the painter, if it has also subtracted something from them; the only study that has ever greatly helped the designer is the study of design as it has been practised before him. To look long at the great compositions of the master designers of the world; to try to find in them, not hard and fast rules of what to do and what to avoid, but the guiding principles on which they are built; to steep oneself in tradition; and then to set oneself to invent new forms which shall be guided by the principles and contained within the boundaries of the old — that is the only way to study design. . . .

In all design concerned with the beautifying of surfaces, as painting is, from the simplest treatment of ornament to the most complicated of naturalistic pictures, the ends to be sought, and the means of attaining these ends, are the same. First, there is the division of the whole

space to be treated into a number of smaller spaces, or masses, which shall be agreeable in their relation to each other and of interesting and beautiful shapes. Some of these spaces will be filled with minor divisions and enriched with details, while others will be left comparatively simple, like the background of ornament, and we have thus the balance of filled and empty spaces which is one of the great beauties of fine design. Some one of the masses will, by size, by position, or by isolation, sometimes by all three means, be made more important than the others, and this principle of subordination will be carried throughout the design, each mass which is subordinate to the principal one having other attendant masses subordinated to it.

After the division of space comes the unification by line. The whole composition will be bound together by a series of lines, either the edges of the masses or interior lines within them; and these lines will not only be agreeable in themselves, but will be so arranged as to lead the eye, easily and without jar or fatigue, from one mass to another, bringing it finally to rest on the dominant mass of the composition. And these lines will have characters of their own, entirely apart from anything they may represent. Horizontal lines will suggest repose, vertical lines will suggest rigidity and stability, curved lines will convey the idea of motion; and the curves will differ among themselves, some being soft and voluptuous, others resilient and tonic.

In the use of these primary elements of composition a number of subsidiary principles will come into play: The principle of balance, either of like subordinate masses either side a central dominant, which is symmetrical and

monumental composition, or of unlike masses at different distances from an ideal center, which is free or pictorial composition, though the Japanese use it in ornament; the principle of repetition, the extreme form of which is the continuous frieze or border, but which is constantly used in pictures; the principle of contrast, the straight line making the curve seem more graceful, the curve making the straight line seem more uncompromising and more rigid.

The structure of the design being thus formed, it will be enriched and re-enforced by the use of light and dark and by the use of color. In a simple panel of ornament, for instance, the filled spaces, that is, the ornament itself, will be either darker or lighter than the ground or empty spaces; or they will be of a different color from the empty spaces, without any greatly marked difference of value. Or the filled spaces may be both lighter and darker than the ground, as they would be in sculpture in relief. The dominance of the most important mass may be increased by making it the lightest, or the darkest, or the most powerfully colored mass, or by giving it the sharpest contrast of light and dark; and however this is done, certain of the subsidiary masses will be given a secondary importance by a less marked use of the same means.

So far the process is identical, whether the content of the design is pure ornament or a great figure painting; but as we approach the free design of the easel picture a new element comes into play. Ornamental design is design in two dimensions only, and decorative painting always tends to retain, or to return to, two-dimensional compositions. But in proportion as painting becomes desirous and able to convey the illusion of space, it begins

to compose in the third dimension also. The things it represents have not only an elevation, but a ground-plan, and the ground-plan must be as thoroughly designed as the elevation. The distances of one mass from another in the direction of the depth of the picture must be as carefully proportioned as the vertical and lateral distances, and the lines traced upon the ideal ground-plan must be as beautiful as those visible upon the vertical surface.

These are, as well as I can explain them in brief compass, the immutable principles of design: few in number, but admitting of so much variety in their application that all the great compositions that have ever been made have not begun to exhaust the possible combinations — there is room for an infinite number of fine compositions still. The extent to which these principles govern the work of the great designers is almost incredible until one has convinced oneself of it by prolonged study. Their scope is co-extensive with the work, and in the masterpieces of design there is absolutely no room for accident. Every smallest detail, each fold of drapery, each leaf in each smallest spray of leafage, is where it must be, and is of its proper form and inevitable size to play its part in the symphony of design. It could no more be somewhere else, or of some other shape, than a note could be of another pitch in a musical composition. Any change in it would change the character of the whole. Designs of this perfection are rare, of course, but they exist; and in some of the compositions of Raphael and Veronese you could not change so much as a tendril of hair or a ring on a finger without loss.[1]

[1] Kenyon Cox, *The Classic Point of View*, pp. 77–93. New York, 1911. By permission of Charles Scribner's Sons.

## IX. SIR FREDERICK POLLOCK ON PERSONALITY AND METHOD

It is an open secret to the few who know it, but a mystery and a stumbling-block to the many, that Science and Poetry are own sisters; insomuch that in those branches of scientific inquiry which are most abstract, most formal, and most remote from the grasp of the ordinary sensible imagination, a higher power of imagination akin to the creative insight of the poet is most needed and most fruitful of lasting work. This living and constructive energy projects itself out into the world at the same time that it assimilates the surrounding world to itself. When it is joined with quick perception and delicate sympathies, it can work the miracle of piercing the barrier that separates one mind from another, and becomes a personal charm. It can be known only in its operation, and is by its very nature incommunicable and indescribable. Yet this faculty, when a man is gifted with it, seems to gather up the best of his life, so that the man always transcends every work shapen and sent forth by him; his presence is full of it, and it lightens the air his friends breathe; it commands, not verbal assent to propositions or intellectual acquiescence in arguments, but the conviction of being in the sphere of a vital force for which nature must make room.[1]

[1] From the Introduction to *Lectures and Essays* by the late Kingdon Clifford, 1901.

## X. SHALER ON THE METHOD OF AGASSIZ

When I first met Louis Agassiz he was still in the prime of his admirable manhood; though he was then fifty-two years old, and had passed his constructive period, he still had the look of a young man. His face was the most genial and engaging that I had ever seen, and his manner captivated me altogether. But as I had been among men who had a free swing, and for a year among people who seemed to be cold and super-rational, hungry as I doubtless was for human sympathy, Agassiz's welcome went to my heart — I was at once his captive. It has been my good chance to see many men of engaging presence and ways, but I have never known his equal.

As the personal quality of Agassiz was the greatest of his powers, and as my life was greatly influenced by my immediate and enduring affection for him, I am tempted to set forth some incidents which show that my swift devotion to my new-found master was not due to the accidents of the situation or to any boyish fancy. I will content myself with one of those stories, which will of itself show how easily he captivated men, even those of the ruder sort. Some years after we came together, when indeed I was formally his assistant, — I believe it was in 1866, — he became much interested in the task of comparing the skeletons of thoroughbred horses with those of common stock. I had at his request tried, but without success, to obtain the bones of certain famous stallions from my acquaintances among the racing men of Kentucky. Early one morning there was a fire, supposed to be incendiary, in the stables in the Beacon Park track, a

mile from the College, in which a number of horses had been killed, and many badly scorched. I had just returned from the place, where I had left a mob of irate owners and jockeys in a violent state of mind, intent on finding some one to hang. I had seen the chance of getting a valuable lot of stallions for the museum, but it was evident that the time was most inopportune for suggesting such a disposition of the remains. Had I done so, the results would have been, to say the least, unpleasant.

As I came away from the profane lot of horse-men gathered about the ruins of their fortunes or their hopes, I met Agassiz almost running to seize the chance of specimens. I told him to come back with me, that we must wait until the mob had spent its rage; but he kept on. I told him further that he risked spoiling his good chance, and finally that he would have his head punched; but he trotted on. I went with him, in the hope that I might protect him from the consequences of his curiosity. When we reached the spot, there came about a marvel; in a moment he had all those raging men at his command. He went at once to work with the horses which had been hurt, but were savable. His intense sympathy with the creatures, his knowledge of the remedies to be applied, his immediate appropriation of the whole situation, of which he was at once the master, made those rude folk at once his friends. Nobody asked who he was, for the good reason that he was heart and soul of them. When the task of helping was done, then Agassiz skilfully came to the point of his business, — the skeletons, — and this so dextrously and sympathetically, that the men were, as it seemed, ready to turn over the living as well

as the dead beasts for his service. I have seen a lot of human doing, much of it critically as actor or near observer, but this was in many ways the greatest. The supreme art of it was in the use of a perfectly spontaneous and most actually sympathetic motive to gain an end. With others, this state of mind would lead to affectation; with him, it in no wise diminished the quality of the emotion. He could measure the value of the motive, but do it without lessening its moral import.

As my account of Agassiz's quality should rest upon my experiences with him, I shall now go on to tell how and to what effect he trained me. In that day there were no written examinations on any subjects to which candidates for the Lawrence Scientific School had to pass. The professors in charge of the several departments questioned the candidates, and determined their fitness to pursue the course of study they desired to undertake. Few or none who had any semblance of an education were denied admission to Agassiz's laboratory. . . . So I was promptly assured that I was admitted. Be it said, however, that he did give me an effective oral examination, which, as he told me, was intended to show whether I could expect to go forward to a degree at the end of four years of study. On this matter of the degree he was obdurate, refusing to recommend some who had been with him for many years, and had succeeded in their special work, giving as reason for his denial that they were 'too ignorant.'

The examination Agassiz gave me was directed first to find that I knew enough Latin and Greek to make use of those languages; that I could patter a little of them evidently pleased him. He did n't care for those detestable

rules for scanning. Then came German and French, which were also approved; I could read both, and spoke the former fairly well. He did not probe me in my weakest place, mathematics, for the good reason that, badly as I was off in that subject, he was in a worse plight. Then asking me concerning my reading, he found that I had read the essay on classification, and had noted in it the influence of Schelling's views. Most of his questioning related to this field, and the more than fair beginning of our relations then made was due to the fact that I had some enlargement on that side. So, too, he was pleased to find that I had managed a lot of Latin, Greek, and German poetry, and had been trained with the sword. He completed this inquiry by requiring that I bring my foils and masks for a bout. In this test he did not fare well, for, though not untrained, he evidently knew more of the *Schläger* than of the rapier. He was heavy-handed and lacked finesse. This, with my previous experience, led me to the conclusion that I had struck upon a kind of tutor in Cambridge not known in Kentucky.

While Agassiz questioned me carefully as to what I had read and what I had seen, he seemed in this preliminary going over in no wise concerned to find what I knew about fossils, rocks, animals, and plants; he put aside the offerings of my scanty lore. This offended me a bit, as I recall, for the reason that I thought I knew, and for a self-taught lad really did know, a good deal about such matters, especially as to the habits of insects, particularly spiders. It seemed hard to be denied the chance to make my parade; but I afterward saw what this meant — that he did not intend to let me begin my

tasks by posing as a naturalist. The beginning was indeed quite different, and, as will be seen, in a manner that quickly evaporated my conceit. It was made and continued in a way I will now recount.

Agassiz's laboratory was then in a rather small two-storied building looking much like a square dwelling-house, which stood where the College Gymnasium now stands. . . . Agassiz had recently moved into it from a shed on the marsh near Brighton bridge, the original tenants, the engineers, having come to riches in the shape of the brick structure now known as the Lawrence Building. In this primitive establishment Agassiz's laboratory, as distinguished from the storerooms where the collections were crammed, occupied one room about thirty feet long and fifteen feet wide — what is now the west room on the lower floor of the edifice. In this place, already packed, I had assigned to me a small pine table with a rusty tin pan upon it. . . .

When I sat me down before my tin pan, Agassiz brought me a small fish, placing it before me with the rather stern requirement that I should study it, but should on no account talk to any one concerning it, nor read anything relating to fishes, until I had his permission to do so. To my inquiry, 'What shall I do?' he said in effect: 'Find out what you can without damaging the specimen; when I think that you have done the work, I will question you.' In the course of an hour I thought I had compassed that fish; it was rather an unsavory object, giving forth the stench of old alcohol, then loathsome to me, though in time I came to like it. Many of the scales were loosened so that they fell off. It appeared to me to be a case for a

summary report, which I was anxious to make and get on to the next stage of the business. But Agassiz, though always within call, concerned himself no further with me that day, nor the next, nor for a week. At first, this neglect was distressing; but I saw that it was a game, for he was, as I discerned rather than saw, covertly watching me. So I set my wits to work upon the thing, and in the course of a hundred hours or so thought I had done much — a hundred times as much as seemed possible at the start. I got interested in finding out how the scales went in series, their shape, the form and placement of the teeth, etc. Finally, I felt full of the subject, and probably expressed it in my bearing; as for words about it, then, there were none from my master except his cheery 'Good morning.' At length, on the seventh day, came the question, 'Well?' and my disgorge of learning to him as he sat on the edge of my table, puffing his cigar. At the end of the hour's telling, he swung off and away, saying: 'That is not right.' Here I began to think that, after all, perhaps the rules for scanning Latin verse were not the worst infliction in the world. Moreover, it was clear that he was playing a game with me to find if I were capable of doing hard, continuous work without the support of a teacher, and this stimulated me to labor. I went at the task anew, discarded my first notes, and in another week of ten hours a day labor I had results which astonished myself, and satisfied him. Still there was no trace of praise in word or manner. He signified that it would do by placing before me about a half a peck of bones, telling me to see what I could make of them, with no further directions to guide me. I soon found that they were the skeletons of half a dozen

fishes of different species — the jaws told me so much at a first inspection. The task evidently was to fit the separate bones together in their proper order. Two months or more went to this task, with no other help than an occasional looking over my grouping, with the stereotyped remark: 'That is not right.' Finally, the task was done, and I was again set upon alcoholic specimens — this time a remarkable lot of specimens, representing perhaps twenty species of the side-swimmers or *Pleuronectidae*.

I shall never forget the sense of power in dealing with things which I felt in beginning the more extended work on a group of animals. I had learned the art of comparing objects, which is the basis of the naturalist's work. At this stage I was allowed to read and to discuss my work with others about me. I did both eagerly, and acquired a considerable knowledge of the literature of ichthyology, becoming especially interested in the system of classification, then most imperfect. I tried to follow Agassiz's scheme of division into the order of ctenoids and ganoids, with the result that I found one of my species of side-swimmers had cycloid scales on one side and ctenoid on the other. This not only shocked my sense of the value of classification in a way that permitted of no full recovery of my original respect for the process, but for a time shook my confidence in my master's knowledge. At the same time I had a malicious pleasure in exhibiting my *find* to him, expecting to repay in part the humiliation which he had evidently tried to inflict on my conceit. To my question as to how the nondescript should be classified, he said: 'My boy, there are now two of us who know that.'

This incident of the fish made an end of my novitiate. After that, with a suddenness of transition which puzzled me, Agassiz became very communicative; we passed, indeed, into the relation of friends of like age and purpose, and he actually consulted me as to what I should like to take up as a field of study. Finding that I wished to devote myself to geology, he set me to work on the *Brachiopoda* as the best group of fossils to serve as data in determining the Palaeozoic horizons. So far as his rather limited knowledge of the matter went, he guided me in the field about Cambridge, in my reading, and to acquaintances of his who were concerned with earth structures.[1]

## XI. THE METHOD OF JOHN SHERREN BREWER

From about the time of his appointment to this office at the Rolls Chapel, the principal work of his life was divided between original historical studies at the Rolls Office and lectures on history and literature at King's College, London. He was entrusted by the Master of the Rolls with the task of calendaring the papers in the Public Records relating to the reign of Henry the Eighth, and during the whole remainder of his life he devoted himself to this duty with an energy and a generosity to which justice can be done only by those who, from their own experience, are able to understand the immense labor as well as learning which it needed. . . .

At the time of Henry the Eighth's reign, the old and the new influences are seen in mortal struggle for the

[1] Nathaniel Southgate Shaler, *Autobiography*, pp. 93–100.

mastery, and to do justice to the drama it is essential for the historian to be in sympathy with both sides. Nothing was more remarkable in Mr. Brewer's mind than its capacity in this respect. He was a distinguished Aristotelian scholar, and thoroughly appreciated the grandeur of the vast logical structures which were raised by the theologians of the Middle Ages; but at the same time he was a devoted disciple of Lord Bacon, read his chief works incessantly, and endeavored to follow the Baconian methods in all his studies and thoughts. Similarly, although deeply read in patristic theology, and, in accordance with his Oxford training, an appreciative disciple of the Caroline divines, he became an enthusiastic admirer of Luther, and, as is proved by the notes in his copy of the Jena edition of Luther's works, had studied him minutely. He regarded him as holding in theology a somewhat similar position to that of Bacon in philosophy — equally the author of an *Instauratio Magna*. Add to this that he was a thorough Englishman in all his sympathies and tastes, and it will be seen what rare qualifications he possessed for the task he undertook.

His labors over the materials of his work gave him, moreover, one other advantage which, in all probability, will never be enjoyed by any one again. The calendars he edited contain an analysis, in chronological order, of every known document relating to Henry the Eighth's reign; and for this purpose he himself read them all through. Now that they have been analyzed, it is most unlikely that any one else will go through the same labor. Yet the actual perusal of such documents is like the personal examination of witnesses, and must afford a

more vivid, living, and accurate perception of their purport than can possibly be obtained at second hand. For years Mr. Brewer lived in daily intercourse, as it were, with the chief actors in the reign of Henry the Eighth. He read their private letters, and followed them into numberless details of their daily lives. He had a special gift for reading character; and the impressions of the men, and of the events of the reign, which such a man received amidst such exceptional opportunities, must needs possess a unique value.

These impressions he communicated to the public in a series of prefaces to the calendars, which constitute, when combined, a complete history of the reign to the death of Wolsey. He entered with too much enthusiasm into the work to be content with a mere prefatory sketch of the contents of each volume. He cast into the form of a finished historical narrative the results of his tedious research, and upon the composition of this narrative he bestowed an immense amount of time and labor which were in no way required of him in the discharge of his official duty. . . .

But, as has been mentioned, in addition to his work at the Rolls Office, Mr. Brewer was for the long period of thirty-eight years, from 1839 till 1877, engaged as a lecturer and professor at King's College, London. In 1839 he was appointed lecturer in classical literature. In 1855 he became professor of the English language and literature, and lecturer in modern history; and the latter two subjects being for a time combined, he became, in 1865, professor of English literature and modern history. It illustrates the wide range and versatility of

his mind that he should thus have passed from classics to modern history and English literature, and that he should have been equally successful in giving instruction in each subject. The transition corresponded very much with a change in his own intellectual interests, and with the increasing concentration of his attention on modern history and modern literature. He retained, indeed, to the last his affection for the classics, always maintaining that as a means of training for the mind English was not equal to Latin and Greek. When students at King's College asked to be excused classical lectures that they might give more attention to Mr. Brewer's lectures in English, the classical teacher would send them to Mr. Brewer, well knowing what he would say to such an application. But his main characteristics as a teacher were the same, whatever the subject in hand. The most remarkable of these was his habit of placing himself side by side, as it were, with his pupils, and teaching them as a fellow-learner of superior knowledge and power, rather than as a master with a right to dictate to them. In his classical lectures, for instance, . . . he would go through very little of his author at a time — some ten or twenty lines, perhaps, of Horace in a lecture; and he would discuss every word with us, eliciting our own knowledge or lack of knowledge respecting it, and, with the dictionary before him, leading us step by step through the process which we ought to have gone through for ourselves. He checked at once those facile off-hand approximations to the meaning of a word or sentence with which beginners are too apt to be content; and thus from the first he made every thoughtful student realize in some measure the depth and

complexity of the language of a great writer. He treated words with just the same laborious, patient, and penetrating observation which a man of science bestows upon the simple facts of nature; and in his company we learned one of the first great lessons of study — not merely our own ignorance as individuals, but the comparative ignorance even of those who know most. Though he knew so much more than we did, he always spoke and acted as if he were as much a learner as we were. The consequence of this modest thoroughness in his way of teaching was that a term or two under him in such a subject as classics placed a capable student in a position in which he could study successfully by himself. Instead of merely acquiring a store of opinions and facts, he had got hold of the true method of working, and had been shown how to thread his way through the labyrinth. Mr. Brewer wrote Latin prose with singular elegance, and was a most severe critic of translations both from and into Latin and Greek. But the pupil whose work was being criticized, or rewritten, saw his master's mind at work in all the details of the process, and learned not merely what the result ought to be, but what were the reasons for it, and the means of producing it.

One other source of his influence over his pupils should be mentioned. The instrument he employed to urge and control them was praise and not blame. Many a young man left the lecture-room with better hopes for himself and the future because Mr. Brewer had detected and praised in his work some merit of which he was himself unconscious. 'The young men,' he would sometimes say, 'see visions; the old men dream dreams.' Perhaps

such a discipline ran some risk of giving undue encouragement to youthful vanity. But his vigilant and critical judgment was ever at hand to check this danger; and the more frequent influence of such training was to induce young men to put forth for adventure in thought and action who would otherwise have stayed with folded hands at home.

Of his method in teaching history two of [his] essays . . . will afford the best conception — those *On the Study of History* in general and *On the Study of English History* in particular. What is most conspicuous in them is the characteristic just noticed in his classical teaching. Instead of giving accounts of historical events, or of their bearings, on his own authority, he seemed to take his pupils by the hand, leading them to the best points of view from which to survey the historical drama, and then to make them feel that it told its own tale to careful and thoughtful observation. He would begin by fixing their attention on the main facts and outlines of a period or a reign, and would draw out of those leading facts, by a kind of historic induction, the great influences which were at work. He was still the companion of his pupils, pointing out to them, at every turn, not so much what he himself saw, as what they could see themselves if they were patient and thoughtful. . . . He held with unabated confidence to his conviction that the main facts of history, and the lessons to be drawn from them, are independent of conflicting interpretations of its details; and nothing was more characteristic of his teaching than the clearness with which he brought out these leading facts, and made his pupils feel that they were independent

of his own opinion, or of the partial views of any historian. The great outlines of history in his hands assumed forms as clear and distinct as the leading facts of any natural science, and he made it felt that they could be accepted with similar confidence.

His researches, indeed, into the reign of Henry the Eighth led him to one conclusion which seems particularly worth mention, and which affords a very remarkable and instructive illustration of these views of the true method of interpreting history. He had penetrated, as we have said, into all the details of Henry the Eighth's reign with a completeness which had never before been possible; and the result, contrary to his own anticipation, was to confirm the general truth of the view of that reign presented by the two writers who had up to a recent date been the most popular authorities respecting it. The best sketch, he said, of Henry the Eighth's reign anywhere to be found is afforded by Shakespeare's play; and next in value to this he reckoned the narrative of Hume. . . .

There was, however, one other subject on which Mr. Brewer was perhaps even more interesting and instructive than as a historian and historical lecturer. That subject was English literature, which, as has been mentioned, was combined for some time with the other work of his chair at King's College. It offered scope for the exercise of all his capacities — as a scholar, a historian, a philosopher, a theologian, a man of letters, and one who had seen a good deal of the world. There was not a single writer of any consequence with whom he did not feel some native sympathy, and he loved to

interpret them all, in their various bearings, in that patient inductive style which characterized him in all his work. Here, again, he adhered to his general method in teaching. He selected the great authors of the successive periods of our history, and their leading works, and concentrated the attention of his pupils upon them. When these were known and understood, the rest, he knew, would fall into their right places and find their level. He was fond of Lord Bacon's saying, that literature is the eye of history, enabling us, as nothing else can, to penetrate into the depths of its life; and to study a great author with him was to live again amidst all the influences of a former age.

One of the most valuable points, accordingly, in his method of teaching English literature was that he was never content with lecturing about authors. He would read in class portions of their greatest works with the same minute thoroughness as he used to bestow, when a classical teacher, upon the great writers of Greece and Rome; he would take his class into fellowship with himself, invite opinions from them, enter into discussion with them, and thus introduce them, with all the pleasure of conscious companionship, into the very heart and life of the book before them. Looking back on his lectures twenty-five years ago upon such authors as Shakespeare, Lord Bacon, Milton, Dryden, Pope, or Coleridge, it is difficult, notwithstanding his own belief, already mentioned, in the essential superiority of classical training, to doubt that English literature might be so treated as to become almost as powerful an instrument of education as the literature of Greece and Rome — that it might

exert an almost equal influence in giving accuracy, thoroughness, and depth to the mind, while it would often lay a more powerful grasp upon the heart. . . .

Such were his public occupations. But in addition to these he accomplished an immense amount of private literary work. . . .

Strange to say, with all this work upon his hands, he was ever at leisure to a favorite friend or pupil, and would spare an hour at almost any time for an interchange of thought with them. On each visit his conversation would be like one of his old friendly lectures, delivered, as the Oxford Statutes have it, *sine ulla solennitate*. No matter how young his visitor might be, he would talk to him as if he were on an equality with himself, and, while pouring out his stores of learning and reflection, would be ever endeavoring to elicit thought and information from his hearer. His modesty in this respect was one of his most remarkable characteristics. Genuine modesty is rare, and is very different from the quality, however laudable, of sincerely endeavoring to be modest. Mr. Brewer, in all his conversation and intercourse with others, acted and spoke as if he were learning from them, when in point of fact, as they might accidentally discover at a later time, he had an acquaintance with the subject under discussion in comparison with which their own was insignificant. There was nothing whatever artificial in this attitude. By that respect for other minds and other natures which made him treat his pupils as if they were fellow-students with himself, he was led to treat all genuine students, and all thoughtful companions, as capable of teaching him

something even in the subjects he knew best. He would be vigorous, and sometimes amusingly positive, in stating his own views, but he was none the less eager to learn from even the rawest and least instructed companion; and one would often be surprised to find at the next interview that he had really been pondering over some suggestion which, at the time it was thrown out, he had summarily overridden.[1]

[1] J. S. Brewer, *English Studies*. Prefatory Memoir by Henry Wace, pp. xvi–xxxiv.

# II

# ON METHOD IN THE STUDY OF LITERATURE

## I. LEIGH HUNT ON RECONSTRUCTING THE SPIRIT OF THE PAST

We have the greatest contempt for learning, merely so called; together with the greatest respect for it when it sees through the dead letter of time and words into the spirit that concerns all ages and all descriptions of men. Every clever unlearned man in England, rich and poor, if we had the magic to do it, should be gifted to-morrow with all the learning that would adorn and endear his commerce to him, his agriculture, and the poorest flower-pot at his window. . . . Spirit is everything, and letter is nothing, except inasmuch as it is a vehicle for spirit.[1]

A little hearty love is better in this, as in all other cases, than a heap of indifferent knowledge. We are ashamed to say that we know less of Greek, in one sense of the word, than we did when young, and are obliged to look out more words in the dictionary; for to a dictionary we are still forced to resort, though we love the language next to Italian, and hold it in higher admiration. But then we know our ignorance better than we did at that time; are more aware of beauties to be enjoyed, and

[1] *A Jar of Honey from Mount Hybla* (London, 1897), pp. 15, 16.

nice meanings to be discovered; and the consequence is that, whenever we undertake to translate a passage from Greek, we take our love on one side of us, and our dictionary on the other, and, before we set about it, make a point of sifting every possible meaning and root of meaning, not excepting those in words the most familiar to us, in order that not an atom of the writer's intention may be missed. We do not say, of course, that we always succeed in detecting it; but it is not for want of painstaking.

The labor we delight in physics pain.

Now by a like respect for the good old maxim of 'slow and sure,' and by dint of doing a little, or even a very little, every day, there is no lover of poetry and beauty who in the course of a few months might not be as deep as a bee in some of the sweetest flowers of other languages.[1]

## II. AUGUST BOECKH ON INTERPRETATION AND CRITICISM AS THE TWO DISTINCT FUNCTIONS IN THE STUDY OF THE PAST

The process of understanding is . . . on the one hand, absolute, on the other, relative. That is, every object must be understood, on the one hand, in and for itself; on the other, it must be understood in relation to other objects. This latter is accomplished by means of an act of judging, through the establishment of a relation between a part and the whole, or between one part and another, or through reference to an ideal. Absolute understanding is the function of Interpretation; relative

[1] *A Jar of Honey from Mount Hybla* (London, 1897), pp. 7, 8.

understanding, the function of Criticism. Under Interpretation is necessarily included every kind of explanation — grammatical, logical, historical, aesthetic; and under Criticism, every kind — higher and lower criticism, and so on; . . . for from the nature of the general conception it is simply inevitable that the entire formal side of philology [the study of language and literature] should be comprised in these two functions.[1]

## III. PROFESSOR COOK'S ADAPTATION OF BOECKH TO THE STUDY OF A PARTICULAR MASTERPIECE

The study of a piece of literature, as distinguished from cursory reading of it, may be directed to either one of two principal ends — interpretation, or criticism. The object of interpretation is the understanding of the work — as a whole, in its organism, and in its details. The object of criticism is the judgment of the work, with reference both to its merits and defects. The object of both interpretation and criticism is intelligent admiration — admiration of that, and that alone, which is truly and eternally admirable.

Whatever study concerns itself with either of these two ends, interpretation or criticism, is literary study. That which is directed to other ends, or to no particular ends, may be useful in its way, and with reference to its own purposes, but has no right to be considered literary study.

The problem of literary teaching consists in the apportionment and adjustment to one another of the various

[1] Boeckh, *Encyclopädie und Methodologie der Philologischen Wissenschaften*, p. 55.

forms of interpretation and criticism. For its solution no precise rules can be given; yet one statement can be made with confidence — that the ambitious, but untrained and inexperienced, teacher is likely to fall into one of two cardinal and opposite errors: either he will aim at an analysis too particularistic, and lose sight of the whole in a consideration of details or constituent parts; or he will indulge in a synthesis too large, too vague, possibly too sentimental, and in any case not sufficiently built up and elaborated by and with his pupils.

To return to the two main divisions of interpretation and criticism. Interpretation is basic, and in its nature precedes criticism. Criticism is supplementary, but indispensable to any literary culture which aspires to thoroughness. Interpretation involves the making clear to oneself of the meaning and function of the various constituent elements of a given piece of literature, and of the piece of literature as a whole. These constituent elements are such as words, sentences, and paragraphs; the organic divisions of a work of literary art, such as the Exordium, Statement of Facts, Proof, etc., of an oration; quotations or allusions; and figures of speech. On each of these attention should be bestowed. . . .

Criticism, from its very nature, implies comparison — comparison with principles assumed or deduced; comparison with other productions of the same class; or, with respect to the opinions enounced by the author, comparison with the statements or opinions of other persons worthy of credence or respect. Thus the structure of Burke's speech might be studied with reference to its conformity or non-conformity to principles deduced from

the practice of the ancients, or the speech might be systematically compared with other eminent examples of its class, ancient or modern, and its superiority or inferiority demonstrated. The style might be examined with respect to various qualities, and its specific merits determined. All information directly tending to confirm or disprove the statements, assumptions, or conclusions propounded by Burke would also be valuable in its bearing upon criticism, since it would increase the ability of the student to determine the trustworthiness of Burke as a guide. Finally, the estimates thus formed by the student might be carefully compared with those expressed by critics of established reputation, both among Burke's contemporaries and those of subsequent date. . . .

Both interpretation and criticism, at least in the case of a master-work like Burke's *Speech on Conciliation*, demand strenuous exercise of the intellectual faculties, as well as continual appeals to the moral nature. The combination of these two kinds of study ought to strengthen the reasoning powers, develop the imagination, cultivate the nobler sensibilities, and fortify the character.[1]

[1] Burke, *Speech on Conciliation* (ed. Albert S. Cook), pp. lxi–lxiii. New York, 1896. By permission of Longmans, Green, & Co.

## IV. BOECKH ON THE RELATION OF ENCYCLOPAEDIA TO METHODOLOGY

[For Boeckh, philology means the reconstruction of the past, the re-experiencing what has been known and felt by the human spirit; and science means the whole field of human knowledge.]

It would be a great error to regard an Encyclopaedia [or circle of learning] as such as a Methodology [or form of procedure], too. Whereas the encyclopaedia has a purely theoretical, scientific aim, the methodology has another; namely, to indicate how one is to acquire the theory. The encyclopaedia furnishes the general structure of the science; it blocks out the whole with great lines and strokes. But the person who wishes to study a science cannot possibly advance straightway upon the whole. Nor can the encyclopaedia, as it were, supplant a methodology by permitting one to study the separate disciplines in the encyclopaedic order. And, were it possible, still it would not be to the purpose. The encyclopaedia starts out with the most general conceptions; the student cannot start out with these — he must take the very opposite course. Whereas the encyclopaedia derives and explains the particular from the general, the student must first of all come to know the particular as the basis and substance of ideas, and from the particular alone can he ascend to the general, if he is really to build up the science within himself, and not merely to take it at second hand. This follows from the conception of philology; for in historical investigation the general is the final result; but the encyclopaedia assumes and presents this result.

A person who wished first to acquire a general survey of the science, that is, to acquire the encyclopaedia, and then gradually to descend to details, would never attain to sound and exact knowledge, but would endlessly disperse his activities, and, knowing many things, would yet know little. Schelling, in his *Methodology of Academical Study*, remarks with great justice that, in history, to start out with a universal survey of the past is in the highest degree useless and injurious, since it gives one nothing but compartments for knowledge, without anything to fill them. In history, his advice is, first to study one period in detail, and from this gradually to broaden out in all directions. For philology, which coincides with history in its most general sense, a similar procedure is, in the light of methodology, the only right one. Everything in science is related; although science itself is endless, yet the whole system is pervaded with sympathies and correspondences. Let the student place himself where he will, — so long as he selects something significant and worth while, — and he will be compelled to broaden out from this point of departure in every direction in order to reach a complete understanding of his subject. From each and every detail one is driven to consider the whole; the only thing that matters is that one go to work in the right way, with strength, intelligence, and avidity. Let one choose several different points of departure, working through from each of them to the whole, and one will grasp the whole all the more surely, and comprehend the wealth of detail all the more fully. Accordingly, by sinking deep into the particular, one most easily avoids the danger of becoming narrow, for, in consequence of

the interrelation of disciplines, investigation in any particular field forces the student into many others. On the other hand, if one from the outset strives only for encyclopaedic many-sidedness, gathering what is most general in all departments, the habit is formed of rapidly passing from one thing to another, and learning nothing from the bottom up.

The great philologists of Holland prescribe a chronological study of all antiquity, in such fashion as to journey through it as if on a country road, making so many miles a day — a fashion of traveling that is not very instructive. This linear procedure does not take one to the heart of things; and in point of fact the Dutch have been superficial in collecting their materials. The only correct method is the cyclic, where one refers everything back to a central point, and from this crosses in all directions to the periphery. In this way the faculty is developed of seizing whatever one does seize upon, with vigor and in earnest; the judgment is exercised to better advantage, because one pauses longer on the individual object; and more talent is developed than by that other, general study, through which, on the contrary, there are engendered the mere opinion of knowledge and a fatal facility.

But though encyclopaedia and methodology are absolutely distinct, it is nevertheless very desirable to unite them; for if we have praised the method of intensive study, it is by no means in the sense that one could merely choose the better alternative, and not concern oneself with the other. The result of that would indeed be a detestable one-sidedness, a quality which must be

driven out in the early stages; for the habit is too easily formed, and out of it comes a self-exaltation that leads every one to consider his own subject of the utmost importance, and everything else of no value. Accordingly, one must make use of the general survey derived from the encyclopaedia as a corrective for intense specialization, acquiring the broad outlook in connection with special study, and beside it. To this end the encyclopaedia must itself furnish a methodical procedure.[1]

## V. METHODS AND AIMS IN THE STUDY OF LITERATURE: OPINIONS FROM TWO POETS

In the study of literature, as in all other study, the fundamental processes are two — observation and comparison. The need of observation in the study of poetry may be inferred from the utterances of Wordsworth on his habit of production:

'I have at all times endeavored to look steadily at my subject; consequently, there is, I hope, in these poems little falsehood of description, and my ideas are expressed in language fitted to their respective importance. Something must have been gained by this practice, as it is friendly to one property of all good poetry, namely, good sense.'[2]

Again, in censuring certain literature of an inferior sort, Wordsworth declares:

'The poetry of the period intervening between the publication of the *Paradise Lost* and the *Seasons* . . .

[1] Boeckh, *Encyclopädie*, pp. 46–48.
[2] Nowell Smith, *Wordsworth's Literary Criticism*, p. 18.

scarcely presents a familiar [image] from which it can be inferred that the eye of the poet had been steadily fixed upon his subject. . . . A blind man, in the habit of attending accurately to descriptions casually dropped from the lips of those around him, might easily depict these appearances with more truth.'[1]

If the eye of the poet must be steadily fixed upon his subject, the eye of the student must be steadily fixed upon the form of the poem as a whole, then upon each detail of it, and again upon the synthesis of all the parts. His first duty is to see the details and the whole precisely as they are; in other words, his first duty is exact observation.

Next, he must compare:

'At school [Christ's Hospital],' says Coleridge, 'I enjoyed the inestimable advantage of a very sensible, though at the same time a very severe, master [the Reverend James Bowyer]. He early molded my taste to the preference of Demosthenes to Cicero, of Homer and Theocritus to Virgil, and again of Virgil to Ovid. He habituated me to compare Lucretius, (in such extracts as I then read) Terence, and, above all, the chaster poems of Catullus, not only with the Roman poets of the so-called silver and brazen ages, but with even those of the Augustan era; and on grounds of plain sense and universal logic to see and assert the superiority of the former in the truth and nativeness both of their thoughts and diction. At the same time that we were studying the Greek Tragic Poets, he made us read Shakespeare and Milton as lessons; and they were the

[1] Nowell Smith, *Wordsworth's Literary Criticism*, p. 185.

lessons, too, which required most time and trouble to *bring up*, so as to escape his censure. I learned from him that poetry, even that of the loftiest, and, seemingly, that of the wildest odes, had a logic of its own, as severe as that of science; and more difficult, because more subtle, more complex, and dependent on more, and more fugitive, causes. In the truly great poets, he would say, there is a reason assignable, not only for every word, but for the position of every word.'[1]

In addition to perfect observation, and strict comparison, the student must cultivate the habit of illustrating every general statement he makes, by one or more specific examples. In the discussion of literature, this involves some familiarity with a number of the best models. Observation, comparison, and specific illustration are the means through which one may ultimately arrive at certitude of literary judgment. Such certitude, however, is ordinarily a matter of slow attainment. On this head, listen to Wordsworth:

'An accurate taste in poetry, and in all the other arts, . . . is an *acquired* talent, which can only be produced by

[1] *Biographia Literaria* (ed. Shawcross) 1. 4. Compare Professor Gildersleeve on Pindar (Warner's *Library of the World's Best Literature* 20. 11490): 'Pindar's noble compounds and his bold metaphors give splendor and vitality to his style; his narrative has a swift and strong movement; and his moral lessons are couched in words of oracular impressiveness. All this needs no demonstration; and so far as details go, Pindar appeals to every lover of poetry.

'And yet, as he himself has said, his song needs interpreters. His transitions are bold, and it is hard to follow his flight. Hence he has been set down as lawless; and modern "Pindarists" have considered themselves free from the laws of consecutive thought and the shackles of metrical symmetry. But whatever the freedom of Pindar's thought, his odes are built on the strictest principles of metrical form; strophe

severe thought, and a long continued intercourse with the best models of composition. This is mentioned, not with so ridiculous a purpose as to prevent the most inexperienced reader from judging for himself, but merely to temper the rashness of decision, and to suggest that if poetry be a subject on which much time has not been bestowed, the judgment may be erroneous, and that in many cases it necessarily will be so.'[1]

So much for method. What, now, is the aim of literary study? Since literature is a *liberal* art, its function must be in some way connected with *liberty*; and since the study of literature belongs among the *humanities*, it must, if properly pursued, tend to make the student more *humane*; that is, more thoughtful, more reverent, and more fearless — more wise, sympathetic, and just. As a liberal art, poetry helps to free us from the slavery of fear; as a humane art, it disentangles us from the bestial part of our natures, and renders us more like the best and happiest, the most typical, men. The destiny of his poems, declares Wordsworth, is 'to console the afflicted; to add sunshine to daylight, by making the happy happier; to teach the young and the gracious of every age to see, to think and feel, and, therefore, to become more actively and securely virtuous.'[2] Or, what amounts to the same thing, the end of his poetry, as of all good poetry, is to arouse, and make lasting, a pleasure that is not

is answered by antistrophe, epode responds to epode, bar to bar. The more one studies the metres, the more one marvels at the delicate and precise workmanship. But when one turns to the thought, the story, then the symmetry becomes less evident — and yet it is there.'

[1] *Wordsworth's Literary Criticism*, pp. 2, 39.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 48.

servile, that only a free and humane, or civilized, man can enjoy. Thus he writes to a friend: 'It is plain from your letter that the pleasure which I have given you has not been blind or unthinking; you have *studied* the poems, and prove that you have entered into the spirit of them. They have not given you a cheap or vulgar pleasure. . . . You have given me praise for having reflected faithfully in my poems the feelings of human nature. I would fain hope that I have done so. But a great poet ought to do more than this; he ought, to a certain degree, to rectify men's feelings, to give them new compositions of feeling, to render their feelings more sane, pure, and permanent, in short, more consonant to nature — that is, to eternal nature, and the great moving spirit of things.'[1]

[1] *Wordsworth's Literary Criticism*, pp. 3, 7. Extract No. V, by Lane Cooper, is taken from the pamphlet mentioned above in the Preface.

# III

# EXTRACTS FROM LETTERS OF WORDSWORTH ON THE STUDY AND PRACTICE OF POETRY

## I. WORDSWORTH TO R. P. GILLIES

If you write more blank verse, pray pay particular attention to your versification, especially as to the pauses on the first, second, third, eighth, and ninth syllables. These pauses should never be introduced for convenience, and not often for the sake of variety merely, but for some especial effect of harmony or emphasis.[1]

## II. WORDSWORTH TO WILLIAM ROWAN HAMILTON

You will have no pain to suffer from my sincerity. With a safe conscience I can assure you that, in my judgment, your verses are animated with true poetic spirit, as they are evidently the product of strong feeling. The sixth and seventh stanzas affected me much, even to the dimming of my eye, and faltering of my voice while I was reading them aloud. . . . You will not, I am sure,

[1] *Letters of the Wordsworth Family* (ed. Knight) 2. 94.

be hurt when I tell you that the workmanship is not what it ought to be:

> Some *touch* of human sympathy find way,
> And whisper that while Truth's and Science' *ray*
> With such serene effulgence o'er thee shone.

Sympathy might whisper, but a *touch* of sympathy could not. 'Truth's and Science' ray,' for the ray of Truth and Science, is not only extremely harsh, but a 'ray *shone*' is, if not absolutely a pleonasm, a great awkwardness; a ray may be said to 'fall' or 'shoot'; and a sun, or a moon, or a candle to 'shine,' but not a ray. . . . If I have the pleasure of seeing you again, I will beg permission to dissect these verses, or any other you may be inclined to show me; but I am certain that . . . your own high powers of mind will lead you to the main conclusions; you will be brought to acknowledge that the logical faculty has infinitely more to do with poetry than the young and the inexperienced, whether writer or critic, ever dreams of. Indeed, as the materials upon which that faculty is exercised in poetry are so subtle, so plastic, so complex, the application of it requires an adroitness which can proceed from nothing but practice; a discernment which emotion is so far from bestowing that at first it is ever in the way of it. . . .

> But shall despondence therefore *blench* my *brow*,
> Or pining sorrow sickly ardor o'er.

These are two of the worst lines in mere expression. 'Blench' is perhaps miswritten for 'blanch'; if not, I don't understand the word. *Blench* signifies to flinch. If 'blanch' be the word, the next ought to be '*hair*.'

You can't here use *brow* for the *hair* upon it, because a white brow or forehead is a beautiful characteristic of youth. 'Sickly ardor o'er' was at first reading to me unintelligible. I took 'sickly' to be an adjective joined with 'ardor,' whereas you mean it as a portion of a verb, from Shakespeare — 'Sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought.' But the separation of the parts, or decomposition of the word, as here done, is not to be endured.[1]

## III. WORDSWORTH TO WILLIAM ROWAN HAMILTON

The poem you were so kind as to inclose gave me much pleasure, nor was it the less interesting for being composed upon a subject you had touched before. The style in this latter is more correct, and the versification more musical. Where there is so much of sincerity of feeling, in a matter so dignified as the renunciation of Poetry for Science, one feels that an apology is necessary for verbal criticism. I will therefore content myself with observing that *joying* for *joy*, or *joyance*, is not to my taste; indeed, I object to such liberties upon principle. We should soon have no language at all if the unscrupulous coinage of the present day were allowed to pass, and become a precedent for the future. One of the first duties of a writer is to ask himself whether his thought, feeling, or image cannot be expressed by existing words or phrases, before he goes about creating new terms, even when they are justified by the analogies of the language. . . .

[1] *Letters of the Wordsworth Family* 2. 312–313.

Your sister must practise her mind in severer logic; for example, the first words of the first poem: 'Thou *most companionless*.' In strict logic, being companionless is a positive condition, not admitting of more or less, though in poetic feeling it is true that the sense of it is deeper as to one object than to another; and the *day* moon is an object eminently calculated for impressing certain minds with that feeling. Therefore the expression is not faulty in itself absolutely, but faulty in its position, coming without preparation, and therefore causing a shock between the common sense of the words and the impassioned imagination of the speaker. This may appear to you frigid criticism, but, depend upon it, no writings will live in which these rules are disregarded. In the next line:

Walking the blue but foreign fields of day;

the meaning here is, walking blue fields which, though common to see in our observation by night, are not so by day, even to accurate observers. Here, too, the thought is just; but again there is an abruptness; the distinction is too nice, or refined, for the second line of a poem.

'Weariness of that *gold* sphere.' *Silver* is frequently used as an adjective by our poets; *gold*, as I should suppose, very rarely, unless it may be in dramatic poetry, where the same delicacies are not indispensable. 'Gold watch,' 'gold bracelet,' etc., are shop language. 'Gold sphere' is harsh in sound, particularly at the close of a line. 'Faint, as if weary of my golden sphere,' would please me better. '*Greets thy rays*.' You do not greet the *ray* by *daylight*; you greet the *moon*; there is no *ray*. 'Daring *flight*' is wrong; the moon, under no

mythology that I am acquainted with, is represented with wings; and though on a stormy night, when clouds are driving rapidly along, the word might be applied to her apparent motion, it is not so here. Therefore 'flight' is here used for unusual or unexpected ascent, a sense, in my judgment, that cannot be admitted. The slow motion by which this ascent is gained is at variance with the word. The rest of this stanza is very pleasing, with the exception of one word — 'thy nature's *breast*.' Say 'profane thy nature'; how much simpler and better! 'Breast' is a sacrifice to rhyme, and is harsh in expression. We have had the *brow* and the *eye* of the moon before, both allowable; but what have we reserved for human beings, if their features and organs, etc., are to be lavished on objects without feeling and intelligence? You will, perhaps, think this observation comes with an ill grace from one who is aware that he has tempted many of his admirers into abuses of this kind; yet, I assure you, I have never given way to my own feelings in personifying natural objects, or investing them with sensation, without bringing all that I have said to a rigorous after-test of good sense, as far as I was able to determine what good sense is. Your sister will judge, from my being so minute, that I have been much interested in her poetical efforts. . . . She will probably write less in proportion as she subjects her feelings to logical forms, but the range of her sensibilities, so far from being narrowed, will extend as she improves in the habit of looking at things through the steady light of words; and, to speak a little metaphysically, words are not a mere vehicle, but they are powers either to kill or to animate.[1]

[1] *Letters of the Wordsworth Family* 2. 397 ff.

## IV. WORDSWORTH TO LORD LONSDALE

As to teaching belles-lettres, languages, law, political economy, morals, etc., by lectures, it is absurd. Lectures may be very useful in experimental philosophy, geology, and natural history, or any art or science capable of illustration by experiments, operations, and specimens; but in other departments of knowledge they are, in most cases, worse than superfluous. Of course I do not include in the above censure *college lectures*, as they are called, when the business consists not of haranguing the pupils, but in ascertaining the progress they have made.[1]

## V. WORDSWORTH TO WILLIAM ROWAN HAMILTON

Again and again I must repeat that the composition of verse is infinitely more of an art than men are prepared to believe, and absolute success in it depends upon innumerable minutiae. . . . Milton [speaks] of pouring 'easy' his 'unpremeditated verse.' It would be harsh, untrue, and odious to say there is anything like cant in this; but it is not *true* to the letter, and tends to mislead. I could point out to you five hundred passages in Milton upon which labor has been bestowed, and twice five hundred more to which additional labor would have been serviceable; not that I regret the absence of such labor, because no poem contains more proof of skill acquired by practice [than *Paradise Lost*].[2]

[1] *Letters of the Wordsworth Family* 2. 259–260. [2] *Ibid.* 2. 470.

# IV

# ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE PRACTICE OF GREAT WRITERS IN COMPOSING

## I. PROFESSOR LOCKWOOD ON MILTON'S CORRECTIONS OF THE MINOR POEMS

Masson, in his 'General Introduction to the Minor Poems,' speaks of 'Milton's habits of composition, and the critical fastidiousness with which, in each revision of his poems, he sought improvements in words or in sound.' Again he says: 'Milton erased and changed so much in the act of writing that it is impossible to give an adequate idea of his habits in this respect except by actual reproduction of the Cambridge manuscript in facsimile.' In 1899 this much desired reproduction was made, at the request of the Council of Trinity College, and under the excellent supervision of Mr. William Aldis Wright. The pages of this facsimile are of great value, because they reveal to us something of Milton's workshop, something of the struggles he had in molding this often stubborn English language to the expression of his thought and the needs of his verse.

Is it true that he was fastidious, and that he changed much? If so, what was he seeking by these changes — clearness of thought, beauty of expression, or the flowing music of his verse? What were his habits of correction;

was the idea as he first conceived it almost perfect, needing only the change of a word here and there; or was the conception, as it first came to him, merely in the rough, demanding one or more rewritings before it satisfied his taste? Mr. Bradley says: 'Verse may be easy and unpremeditated, as Milton says his was,[1] and yet many a word in it may be changed many a time, and the last change be more "inspired" than the original.'[2] Does the manuscript lead us to believe that the early verse was unpremeditated, as well as the later — of which Milton makes this assertion; or did he rely much on these third and fourth inspirations?

Lamb greatly regretted the evil hour in which he had been shown these pages at Cambridge: 'How it staggered me to see the fine things in their ore! interlined, corrected! as if their words were mortal, alterable, displaceable at pleasure! as if they might have been otherwise, and just as good! as if inspiration were made up of parts, and these fluctuating, successive, indifferent! I will never go into the workshop of any great artist again.'[3] However many persons there may be who still hold Lamb's point of view, the student of English finds his joy in the poetry noway diminished, and his interest in the poet greatly increased, by attempting through a study of these manuscript lines, the most of them in Milton's own handwriting, to learn at least a little of how the poet worked in fashioning his poetic conceptions.

[1] *Paradise Lost* 9. 24.

[2] A. C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy*, p. 68.

[3] See the note to Lamb's essay, *Oxford in the Vacation*, quoted in part by Wright in his introduction to the *Facsimile*.

A superficial examination of these sheets shows one thing clearly — that Milton was extremely careful of his manuscript. The margins and lines are almost always straight, and the words clearly written; wherever the pen has been drawn through, it has been done in clean fashion, not to mar letters above or below the canceled words. New phrases, and often words, are written plainly in the margin, frequently with a star at the new and old to indicate that one fits into the place of the other. Occasionally a pen mark connects the fresh material with that which has been stricken out, in order to leave no question about its position. An erased word, on second thought to be retained, is in almost all instances sharply underscored. Milton, it is true, sometimes rather overdoes this nice exactness, as when he closes *Comus* with 'Exit,' 'the end,' 'Finis.' The writing of these poems was done at many and various times from 1631 to at least 1645, yet the pages which Milton himself wrote differ little in form or in scrupulous care.

Another impression we gain from a glance at these written sheets is that there is a good deal of revision; there are but two pages wholly free from erasures or insertions, and these two contain only one sonnet each. There are thirty-nine folio pages filled, or partly filled, with poetry, and of these fully four have been altogether crossed out and rewritten, or entirely discarded. It is true that many of the lines in these sections through which he has drawn his condemning pen are incorporated in the newly composed parts, yet they are in a new order or setting, and bring to the ear and mind a different thought. There is, again, no very large number of consecutive

uncorrected lines. Sonnet II,[1] that on his twenty-third birthday, is free from any changes, but that was doubtless a copy of the first draft, which may have been repeatedly altered. The little poem *On Time*, and Sonnets VIII and XXIII, stand just as first written; the verses *Upon the Circumcision* — excluding the marginal rewriting of the last two lines, — and Sonnets XV and XXI, have corrections only in spelling. However, these sonnets, except No. II, are all in the hand of an amanuensis; and where another used the pen, the revisions are proportionally fewer — probably because the poet elaborated the theme more carefully before repeating it to another than when he could himself make experiments on paper. With these few exceptions, every page shows the labor Milton spent in making the language express exactly the shade of meaning he had in mind.

Although a cursory glance at the pages seems to tell that the poet has altered much, yet when we come to examine them in detail, we find that of the 1813 lines fully three-fourths are without any corrections at all; and, moreover, to this total of first-hand lines, he has added as afterthought only 53. He has discarded entirely but 56, and has rewritten of whole lines barely 162. The erasures and substitutions are so scattered throughout the pages, and are so much more apparent to the eye than the untouched lines, that the judgment at a glance is easily accounted for. So large a number of lines retained just as set down on paper indicates, I think, not that he changed much, but that he altered relatively little. However, I

[1] The numbering of the Sonnets is that of the Globe Edition of Milton.

have not compared his facility with that of other poets, and such a comparison might reverse this conclusion.

Milton has made the greatest number of changes in phrases — in combinations of two or more words; sometimes he substitutes one word for two, or vice versa, or he alters the tense of a verb, or varies the construction. For example, he changes 'beetle brows' to 'complexions'; 'whose sway' to 'beside the sway'; 'it finds' to 'is found'; 'hid in' to 'or with.'

Next in number are the changes in individual words; and among these he has had about equal difficulty with the noun and adjective. The right verb came to his demand much more frequently, as is shown by the fact that he has substituted other verbs in only about half as many instances as he has been compelled to seek name words or words of description. There are two of these corrected verbs which strike responsive chords of sympathy from all those who would write and speak English with accuracy. In *Comus* 427 he sets down first 'shall,' and then substitutes 'will.' In the last two lines of *Circumcision* the same thing occurs; for some reason he has written these lines a second time in the margin, and it is in this second marginal writing that we find first 'shall,' and then 'will.' He evidently was not unconscious in his precise use of these two difficult words. Those perplexing small words in our language which cost most of us so much blue penciling gave Milton singularly little trouble; he changes separate pronouns only nine times, prepositions eight, conjunctions ten, the article two, and the adverb five times.

Milton seldom slipped into the mechanical fault of writing a word twice — of repeating words; but his

absent-mindedness is sometimes clearly in evidence. He writes, *Comus* 288: 'No less then then if I should my brothers lose'; and 483: 'Either either some one.' There is, however, usually a better reason for any repetitions which occur. Sometimes he writes down the word, and then his ear tells him that it belongs in the next line, so he repeats it in its proper position, as 'of,' *Arcades* 89; or he carries the word over from the end of one line to the beginning of the next, as 'heare,' *Arcades* 72. Again, he thinks to change a word, and erases it; then decides to retain the same word, and rewrites it, as 'eye,' *Comus* 329. Twice the repetition is plainly due to the fact that in the middle of the line he determines on a different order of words — *Arcades* 57, 'awakes the leaves slumbering leaves.' But most frequently the word is rewritten because the first spelling is not correct; yet there are hardly more than a dozen such instances.

Milton's purpose in revising his poems, if intention may be judged by result, was to render the thought clear, logical, and vivid. I believe three-fourths of the corrections attain this end. He revised less to make a well-sounding line, a more picturesque or imaginative verse, than a verse which expressed a coherent and convincing thought. In doing this there appear to have been certain habits which he recognized as a part of his style, and which he sought to correct. For example, in recasting he frequently substitutes a less technical word or phrase, as if he himself saw the possible danger to his poetry from his learning. In *Solemn Music* 2 'Mixe your choise chords' is changed to 'wed your divine sounds,' and in a line later entirely omitted, 'chromatik jarres' is

erased for 'ill sounding'; *Comus* 21, 'the rule and title' becomes 'imperial rule'; in 310 'steerage of' — 'guess of'; in 134 'polisht' — 'cloudie'; in 242 'hold a counterpoint' — 'give resounding grace.' Again, he seeks a simpler expression, one savoring less of bombast; which trick of style he loved in his extreme youth, as is clearly revealed in the translation of the Psalms, and which he doubtless fell into from much reading of the Elizabethans. In *Comus* the Lady rapturously exclaims — following line 215: 'while I see yee this dusky hollow is a paradise and heaven gates ore my head.' The poet has certainly felt the incongruity of such sentiments, and finally allows her to say only: 'I see yee visibly.' At line 696, as first written, she addresses Comus: 'O my simplicity what sights are these? what dark disguises and soothing lies. hence with thy treacherous kindnesse thou man of lies and falsehood, if thou give it me I throw it on the ground.' The Brothers are on occasion bombastic enough, but the case against them would be worse if the following lines had been allowed to remain — after line 357: 'so fares as did forsaken Proserpine when the big wallowing flakes of pitchie clowds and darkness wound her in.' Again, the Elder Brother first closed his speech at line 383 with this mouth-filling phrase: 'walks in black vapours, though the noontyde brand blaze in the summer solstice.'

Usually, however, it is reasonably clear that Milton is revising for the direct purpose of rendering the thought more logical or more vivid. In *Arcades* 8–12 'Fame' was, in the first draft, the subject of all the lines; the change to 'we' gives a clearer sense of the relation of the two parties in the contention. *Solemn Music* 10 has

first 'tripled,' but the substituted 'burning' unifies the line by carrying out the idea of 'bright.' In 14 'blooming palms' is changed to 'victorious palms,' thus giving a thought in accord with the context. In *Comus* 193 'youthly' comes less fittingly from the mouth of the young girl than 'wandering.' That fine line, 208, stands, as first written down: 'and airy tongues that lure night wanderers'; where, of course, the whole harmony of the passage is lost by intruding a definite statement amid the delicate suggestiveness of the lines immediately preceding and following. In *Comus* 349 the words are 'sad,' then 'lone,' and 'finally 'close'; neither one of the first two seems to come logically from the lips of young men in the act of finding a person to whom the wood might reasonably appear 'sad' or 'lone.' In 355 we read: 'she leans her thoughtful head musing at our unkindnesse'; which gives exactly the opposite impression of the line as revised. *Comus* 713 has first 'cramming' instead of 'thronging,' and this impossible thought is followed by the still more impossible idea, expressed in a fortunately erased line: 'the fields with cattle and the aire with fowle.' Where whole verses are rewritten in the margin, this rewriting is again almost always to render the thought clearer. *Comus* 175 is added to offer a reason for 176; 254 and 255 give concreteness and vividness to a picture that would otherwise lack a definite cause and position; line 456 is inserted to present the negative action of the angels, which prepares for the positive action in the verses that follow. So the list might be greatly increased; and in each case the evident search on the part of the poet was for a strong, unified thought.

It is perhaps a surprise to find how rarely Milton has to work solely for poetic suggestiveness — how seldom he feels it necessary to substitute for words thin in imaginative content those rich in suggestion. This is, however, sometimes plainly his intention, as in *Comus* 117, where he replaces 'yellow' with 'tawny'; or in 181, where 'blind alleys of this arched wood' becomes 'blind mazes of this tangled wood'; or in 498, where 'leapt ore the penne' is changed to 'slipt from the fold.' In *Comus* 821 the plain prose of 'there is another way' is slightly improved into 'some other meanes I have.' The substitution of 'pearled' for 'white' in 834 alters the whole character of the picture, making it far more appealing to the imagination. The added line, 442, 'faire silver-shafted Queen for ever chast,' has no other purpose than that of imaginative suggestion.

In less than one-fourth of the instances of correction the poet's desire for a smoother line, a verse more pleasing to the ear, appears to have dictated the choice of words or phrases. One has only to take a present-day text and read the following lines, making the indicated substitutions, to be sure that this was his purpose. *Arcades* 13, read 'her hide' for 'conceal'; 18, 'seated' for 'sitting'; 50, 'leaves' for 'boughs'; *Comus* 58, 'nam'd him Comus' for 'him Comus named'; 576, 'solitarie sweet retire' for 'sweet retired solitude.' This purpose is perhaps more clearly seen in certain whole lines. He writes, *Solemn Music* 11: 'high lifted loud archangel trumpets blow'; and gains, not thought but sound, by rewriting: 'their loud uplifted angel trumpets blow.' Again, the weak line at 20, 'drown'd natures chime and with

tumultuous din,' becomes the very strong onomatopoeic verse: 'jarred against natures chime and with harsh din.' In a few cases, as *Comus* 376, the chief reason for the change is, it seems, to avoid too much alliteration.

In a small number of lines he has revised for the sake of metre only, but the smallness of the number shows how true was Milton's ear, how attuned to the needs of his verse. In *Comus* 257 'would weepe' is changed to 'wept,' evidently to get rid of an extra syllable; in 73 'before' is blotted after 'as,' and in 304 'out' after 'then,' for the same reason.

The question of Milton's dependence on third, or fourth, or later, inspirations is interesting, because the number of cases in which he has sought again and again for the right word or phrase is only about forty, and because in several of these instances he has finally returned to the word with which he began. For example, the rewritings stand, *Solemn Music* 20: 'ever-endlesse light,' 'ever-glorious,' 'uneclipsed,' 'where day dwells without night,' 'in endlesse morn of light,' 'in cloudlesse birth of light,' 'in never parting light.' In the final recast he chooses the fifth form, which combines the two ideas he is seeking — duration and brightness. In *Comus* 448 he searches for an adjective to be applied to Minerva: 'eternal,' 'unvanquisht,' 'unconquer'd.' Line 545 shows his difficulty in determining just how the honeysuckle shall best be characterized: 'suckling,' 'blowing,' 'flaunting,' 'blowing,' 'flaunting.' In 962 he has much ado to make the words fit: 'of speedier toeing,' 'of nimbler toeing,' 'of lighter toeing'; and finally in 'of lighter toes' he wins the right concrete phrase. In 556 — 'soft,' 'still,'

'soft,' 'sweet,' 'soft'—he returns to 'soft,' probably thinking it was the best he could do. He was not, then, as a recent writer has well-nigh made him, one of the Nine, but he had sometimes to struggle with words as lesser men have had to do.

What are the poems, if we may judge by the amount of revision shown in the manuscript, which caused him most labor? *Arcades* was written with much ease — at least with few corrections. *At a Solemn Music* was the result of hours of work and many rewritings; it is entirely rewritten three times — the last ten lines four times; and the first two versions have many changes. *Comus* shows, I believe, more uniform care for the right choice of words than any other poem. After the first four lines he wisely blots fifteen lines, mostly about gardens, roses, and dragons in the land where the Spirit has lived. They are diffuse, and mar the quiet strength of the opening verses. The weak line at 133 he has sought to remodel, but has not much improved it: 'and makes a blot of nature and throws a blot'; then, in the margin, the line as it is now in the text. *Comus* 350–358 has been much rewritten; even as it is at present, Milton was dissatisfied with it, and pasted on the margin of the next sheet a new form, but this attached slip has unfortunately been lost. Lines 672–705, also the Lady's speech at 663, originally stood after 755; they have been crossed, and rewritten on a separate slip, with the note that they are to be inserted after 'in primrose season.' Lines 807–810 as first written were: 'come y' are too morall this is meere morall stuffe the very lees and settlings of a melancholy blood.' In this passage

the change seems to me for the worse, certainly more technical. As is sometimes the case, he might better have kept his first inspiration. He has added lines 869–874, which we could ill spare from this beautiful invocation. The last song of the Spirit has been wholly rewritten, three lines being crossed, and fifteen added; those added include the verses relating to Spring and the Graces, the completion of the picture of Adonis, and the story of Cupid. Each of these passages fills up and rounds out the picture which it closes; the song read without them fails to give us as a whole the feeling of sumptuousness it was certainly intended to give.

*Lycidas* came to Milton's imagination, or at least to paper, in a very perfect form. He writes the first fourteen lines, and then tries the flower passage, which was evidently haunting his thought. He sets it down once, crosses it all out, and begins over again. Line 146 was nearer inspiration as first written: 'the muske rose and the garish columbine'; but perhaps it did not express his feeling for the flower, or it did not sound appropriate to have so gaudy a flower about the dead. Ruskin calls 148 'mixed fancy and imagination'; the first version, 'every bud that sorrows liverie weares,' is also mixed, but perhaps less objectionable than the form we are familiar with. After the flower passage is to his mind, he takes a fresh sheet, and, commencing the poem once more, writes to the end with very little recasting, except at 58–62, which he thrice revises. Save for these two difficult parts, Milton seems to have written *Lycidas* with little premeditation, and hence with ease.

The Sonnets, fifteen in number, including *On the New Forcers of Conscience* (the only ones not in this manuscript are I, XVIII, XIX, XX), are fairly free from corrections, except in the case of single words, and these not numerous. Three only have been revised to any extent. The thirteenth, to Lawes, Milton seems to have been so particular about, so careful to have of the right shade of dignity, that he has refined away much of the vividness of phrase; there is a strength and sureness in the first draft that the second lacks. For example, line 4, 'misjoining' is better than 'committing'; line 6, 'and gives thee praise above the pipe of Pan,' is more easily grasped by the imagination than the line as we have it, about Envy. Again, lines 12 and 13 are swifter as first written: 'by the Tuscan's leav, shall set thee higher then old Casella whom Dante woo'd to sing.' He appears to have had a like thought about Sonnet XIV, to Mrs. Thomson; it must be stately, large-sounding; and the rewriting has had the similar result of making the sonnet less vigorous. The revision of Sonnet XI is not so great in the number of changes made, but it has almost as marked an effect upon the whole; here, with quite a different subject and doubtless for a very different reason, he has really accomplished much the same thing as in working over the other two — taken some of the strength and life out of it. It began: 'I writ a book'; and lines 3 and 4 read: 'it went off well about the town a while, numbering good wits; but now is seldom poured on.' The change to the third person and passive voice, which he made in revising, has not improved it.

It is true, indeed, that in a few cases Milton's second idea is less poetic than the first, but in most instances the

later thought is by far the more inspired, and the work of revision has been wisely expended. The manuscript shows, moreover, that, although he was a poet who generally worked with a good deal of ease, and changed comparatively little, yet he was also an untiring critic of his own poems; and that many words and phrases, as well as occasional long passages, cost him much labor in bringing the thought to the fulfilment of expression.[1]

## II. HORACE

Nor would the land we love be now more strong
In warrior's prowess than in poet's song,
Did not her bards with one consent decline
The tedious task, to alter and refine.
Dear Pisos! as you prize old Numa's blood,
Set down that work, and that alone, as good,
Which, blurred and blotted, checked and counterchecked,
Has stood all tests, and issued forth correct.[2]

## III. BEN JONSON ON SHAKESPEARE

I remember, the Players have often mentioned it as an honour to *Shakespeare*, that in his writing (whatsoever he penn'd) hee never blotted out line. My answer hath beene, would he had blotted a thousand. Which they thought a malevolent speech. I had not told posterity this, but for their ignorance, who chose that circumstance to commend their friend by, wherein he most faulted. And to justifie mine owne candor (for I lov'd the man,

[1] Laura E. Lockwood, in *Modern Language Notes* 25. 201–205.
[2] Horace, *Ars Poetica* (tr. Conington) 289–294.

and doe honour his memory (on this side Idolatry) as much as any). Hee was (indeed) honest, and of an open, and free nature; had an excellent *Phantsie*; brave notions, and gentle expressions: wherein hee flowed with that facility, that sometime it was necessary he should be stop'd. '*Sufflaminandus erat*,' as Augustus said of Haterius. His wit was in his owne power; would the rule of it had beene so too. Many times hee fell into those things, could not escape laughter; as when he said in the person of *Caesar*, one speaking to him: 'Caesar, thou dost me wrong.' Hee replyed, 'Caesar did never wrong, but with just cause'; and such like, which were ridiculous. But hee redeemed his vices, with his vertues. There was ever more in him to be praysed, then to be pardoned.[1]

## IV. BEN JONSON ON STYLE

For a man to write well, there are required three Necessaries: To reade the best Authors, observe the best Speakers, and much exercise of his owne style. In style to consider what ought to be written, and after what manner. Hee must first thinke, and excogitate his matter; then choose his words, and examine the weight of either. Then take care in placing and ranking both matter and words, that the composition be comely; and to doe this with diligence, and often. No matter how slow the style be at first, so it be labour'd and accurate; seeke the best, and be not glad of the froward conceipts, or first words that offer themselves to us, but judge of what wee invent, and order what wee approve. Repeat often

[1] Ben Jonson, *Discoveries* (ed. Castelain), pp. 35, 36.

what wee have formerly written; which, beside that it helpes the consequence and makes the juncture better, it quickens the heate of imagination, that often cooles in the time of setting downe, and gives it new strength, as if it grew lustier by the going back. As we see in the contention of leaping, they jumpe farthest that fetch their race largest; or, as in throwing a Dart or Javelin, wee force back our armes to make our loose the stronger. Yet, if we have a faire gale of wind, I forbid not the steering out of our sayle, so the favour of the gale deceive us not. For all that wee invent doth please us in the conception or birth — else we would never set it downe. But the safest is to returne to our Judgement, and handle over againe those things, the easinesse of which might make them justly suspected. So did the best Writers in their beginnings; they impos'd upon themselves care and industry; they did nothing rashly. They obtain'd first to write well, and then custome made it easie and a habit. By little and little, their matter shew'd itself to 'hem more plentifully; their words answer'd, their composition followed; and all, as in a well-order'd family, presented itself in the place. So that the sum of all is: Ready writing makes not good writing; but good writing brings on ready writing. Yet, when wee thinke we have got the faculty, it is even then good to resist it — as to give a Horse a check sometimes with (a) bit, which doth not so much stop his course as stirre his mettle. Againe, [whither] a mans *Genius* is best able to reach, thither it should more and more contend, lift, and dilate it selfe; as men of low stature raise themselves on their toes, and so ofttimes get even, if not eminent. Besides, as it is fit

for grown and able Writers to stand of themselves and worke with their owne strength, to trust and endeavour by their owne faculties; so it is fit for the beginner and learner to study others, and the best. For the mind and memory are more sharpely exercis'd in comprehending an other mans things then our owne; and such as accustome themselves, and are familiar with the best Authors, shall ever and anon find somewhat of them in themselves, and, in the expression of their minds, even when they feele it not, be able to utter something like theirs which hath an Authority above their owne.[1]

## V. SAMUEL JOHNSON

Upon his mentioning that when he came to College he wrote his first exercise twice over, but never did so afterwards — Miss Adams. 'I suppose, Sir, you could not make them better?' Johnson. 'Yes, Madam, to be sure, I could make them better. Thought is better than no thought.' Miss Adams. 'Do you think, Sir, you could make your *Ramblers* better?' Johnson. 'Certainly I could.' Boswell. 'I 'll lay a bet, Sir, you cannot.' Johnson. 'But I will, Sir, if I choose. I shall make the best of them you shall pick out, better.' Boswell. 'But you may add to them. I will not allow of that.' Johnson. 'Nay, Sir, there are three ways of making them better: putting out, adding, or correcting.'[2]

[1] Ben Jonson, *Discoveries* (ed. Castelain), pp. 84–86.
[2] Boswell's *Life of Johnson* (Oxford Edition) 2. 562.

## VI. ROUSSEAU

Two things, very opposite, unite in me, and in a manner which I cannot myself conceive. My disposition is extremely ardent, my passions lively and impetuous, yet my ideas are produced slowly, with great embarrassment and after much afterthought. It might be said my heart and understanding do not belong to the same individual. A sentiment takes possession of my soul with the rapidity of lightning, but instead of illuminating, it dazzles and confounds me; I feel all, but see nothing; I am warm, but stupid; to think, I must be cool. What is astonishing, my conception is clear and penetrating, if not hurried. I can make excellent impromptus at leisure, but on the instant could never say or do anything worth notice. . . .

This slowness of thought, joined to vivacity of feeling, I am not only sensible of in conversation, but even alone. When I write, my ideas are arranged with the utmost difficulty. . . .

Thence arises the extreme difficulty I find in writing; my manuscripts, blotted, scratched, and scarcely legible, attest the trouble they cost me; nor is there one of them but I have been obliged to transcribe four or five times before it went to press. Never could I do anything when placed at a table, pen in hand; it must be walking among the rocks, or in the woods. It is at night in my bed, during my wakeful hours, that I compose; it may be judged how slowly, particularly for a man who has not the advantage of verbal memory, and never in his life could retain by heart six verses. Some of my periods I have turned and re-turned in my head five or six nights

before they were fit to be put to paper; — thus it is that I succeed better in works that require laborious attention than those that appear more trivial, such as letters, in which I could never succeed, and being obliged to write one is to me a serious punishment; nor can I express my thoughts on the most trivial subjects without it costing me hours of fatigue. If I write immediately what strikes me, my letter is a long, confused, unconnected string of expressions, which, when read, can hardly be understood.[1]

## VII. GILMAN ON COLERIDGE

It has been repeated, *ad nauseam*, that great minds will not descend to the industrious accumulation of those acquirements best suited to fit them for independence. To say that Coleridge would not *condescend* would be a calumny; — nay, when his health permitted, he would drudge and work more laboriously at some of the mechanical parts of literature than any man I ever knew.[2]

## VIII. COLERIDGE

[Coleridge writes] . . . The delay in copy has been owing to me as the writer of *Christabel*. Every line has been produced by me with labor pangs.[3]

[1] Rousseau, *Confessions*, Book 3, pp. 86, 87, in the translation published by Glaisher.

[2] Gilman, *Life of Coleridge*, p. 63.

[3] *Christabel* (ed. E. H. Coleridge), pp. 39–40.

## IX. WORDSWORTH, AS SEEN BY HIS SISTER

Monday, 25th January [1802]. . . . Wm. tired with composition. . . .

On Saturday, 30th, Wm. worked at *The Pedlar* all the morning. He kept the dinner waiting till four o'clock. He was much tired. . . .

Sunday, 31st. Wm. had slept very ill. He was tired. . . .

Monday, February 1st. Wm. slept badly. I baked bread. William worked hard at *The Pedlar*, and tired himself. . . .

Tuesday, 2d February. . . . William worked at *The Pedlar*. . . .

Friday, 5th. . . . Wm. cut wood a little. Sate up late at *The Pedlar*. . . .

Monday Morning, 8th February. . . . William worked at his poem. . . .

Tuesday. Wm. had slept better. He fell to work, and made himself unwell. . . . We went to bed, but not till Wm. had tired himself. . . .

Wednesday, 10th. . . . I was writing out the poem — as we hoped, for a final writing. . . . We read the first part, and were delighted with it, but Wm. afterwards got to some ugly place, and went to bed tired out. . . .

Thursday, 11th. . . . Wm. sadly tired and working at *The Pedlar*. . . .

Friday, 12th. A very fine, bright, clear, hard frost. Wm. working again. I recopied *The Pedlar*, but poor Wm. all the time at work. . . .

Saturday, 13th. . . . Still at work at *The Pedlar*, altering and refitting. . . .

Tuesday, 16th. . . . He was better — had altered *The Pedlar*. . . .

Wednesday [March 3]. I was so unlucky as to propose to rewrite *The Pedlar*. Wm. got to work, and was worn to death. . . .

Friday Morning. . . . I wrote *The Pedlar*, and finished it before I went to Mrs. Simpson's to drink tea. . . .

Sunday Morning. . . . I stitched up *The Pedlar*; wrote out *Ruth*; read it with the alterations . . .

Tuesday Morning. . . . We sate by the fire in the evening, and read *The Pedlar* over. William worked a little, and altered it in a few places.[1]

## X. DE QUINCEY

What may certainly be said of these, or of any dreams or series of dreams which De Quincey ever had ready to insert in the *Confessions*, is that, on his own word, they were not written in a mere glow of spirits. He reminds the reader 'of the perilous difficulty besieging all attempts to clothe in words the visionary scenes derived from the world of dreams, where a single false note, a single word in a wrong key, ruins the whole music.' We have already referred to the passages in which he implies, or directly affirms, that some smaller part of the *Confessions* had not been written hastily — had received at least 'an ordinary verbal correction.' De Quincey sympathizes with the toils of others in composition — with the excessive labor of Junius, for example; and we know by all accounts how careful a workman he himself was, how

[1] *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth* (ed. Knight) 1. 82 ff.

rarely content with his creations. The greater part of the *Confessions*, because of pecuniary stress, was hastily put together. Later in life, when the author came to revise, he bestowed measureless pains on this work, toiling on in spite of 'a nervous malady of very peculiar character.' 'Although pretty nearly dedicating myself to this one solitary labor, and not intermitting or relaxing it for a single day, I have yet spent,' he says in 1856, 'within a very few days, six calendar months upon the recast of this one small volume.' In this revision he changed the general narrative to a large extent, he added lyrical matter as well, and he slightly modified the lyrical matter already existing.[1]

## XI. CARDINAL NEWMAN

It is simply the fact that I have been obliged to take great pains with everything I have written, and I often write chapters over and over again, besides innumerable corrections and interlinear additions.... I have heard that Archbishop Howley, who was an elegant writer, betrayed the labor by which he became so by his mode of speaking, which was most painful to hear from his hesitations and alterations — that is, he was correcting his composition as he went along.

However, I may truly say that I never have been in the practice since I was a boy of attempting to write well, or to form an elegant style. I think I have never written for writing' sake; but my one and single desire and aim has been to do what is so difficult — viz. to express clearly

[1] Lane Cooper, *The Prose Poetry of Thomas De Quincey*, p. 32.

and exactly my meaning; this has been the motive principle of all my corrections and rewritings. When I have read over a passage which I had written a few days before, I have found it so obscure to myself that I have either put it altogether aside or fiercely corrected it; but I don't get any better for practice. I am as much obliged to correct and rewrite as I was thirty years ago.[1]

## XII. CHARLES LAMB

You . . . cannot conceive of the desultory and uncertain way in which I (an author by fits) sometimes cannot put the thoughts of a common letter into sane prose. Any work which I take upon myself as an engagement will act upon me to torment; e.g., when I have undertaken, as three or four times I have, a schoolboy copy of verses for Merchant Taylors' boys, at a guinea a copy, I have fretted over them, in perfect inability to do them, and have made my sister wretched with my wretchedness for a week together.[2]

## XIII. MANZONI

The publication, a few months ago, by Francesco Sforza, of *Brani inediti dei Promessi Sposi* (*Unpublished Passages from I Promessi Sposi*) has led to a second and enlarged edition (964 pages divided into two volumes, whereas the original edition was a single volume of 692 pages). The reading public, it is evident, has not agreed with those

[1] *Letters and Correspondence of John Henry Newman* (ed. Mozley) 2. 476, 477.

[2] Lucas, *Life of Charles Lamb* 1. 335, 336.

critics who indignantly regarded Sforza's book as a profanation of Manzoni's memory in bringing to light what had been, after mature judgment, deliberately omitted, but has found a special literary value in the steps through which the masterpiece developed. The *Brani* bear witness to an incessant correcting, retouching, and polishing, and prove to what a degree Manzoni carried his revision, writing and rewriting a line a score of times, and then perhaps, after all, not printing a word of it. He was moved, apparently, sometimes by religious scruples, sometimes by aesthetic considerations, or by motives of historical accuracy.[1]

## XIV. TENNYSON

And then he [Tennyson] questioned W[allace] again about tropical scenery, producing a poem in MS., from which he read two or three lines about palms and purple seas. He wanted to know if the palm-trees could be seen rising distinct above the rest of the forest.

W. — 'Yes, on a hill-side.'

'What color are they?'

'Rather light — gray-green.'

'Is an expanse of tropical forest *dark*, seen from above?'

'Not particularly; less so than an English woodland.'

T. — 'Then I must change the word "dark."'

He writes his poetry now in trim small quarto books, in limp covers, the writing as neat as ever, though sometimes a little shaky. He keeps these books handy and takes them up very often, both at set times and odd

[1] The *Nation*, November 9, 1905, p. 384.

moments, considering and correcting, and frequently reading new poems aloud from them, first to his family and afterwards to visitors. After the compositions are put into type he usually keeps them by him in proof for a long time, months or even years, reconsidering and perfecting every part.[1]

## XV. STEVENSON

In his essays he [Stevenson] has told us how he learned to write; and in an essay which appeared in the *Contemporary Review* of April, 1885, he discloses to us the secret of his art. In *Memories and Portraits* he writes: 'All through my boyhood and youth I was known and pointed out for the pattern of an idler; and yet I was always busy on my own private end, which was to learn to write. I kept always two books in my pocket, one to read, one to write in. As I walked, my mind was busy fitting what I saw with appropriate words; when I sat by the roadside, I would either read, or a pencil and a penny version-book would be in my hand, to note down the features of the scene, or commemorate some halting stanzas. Thus I lived with words. And what I thus wrote was for no ulterior use; it was written consciously for practice. It was not so much that I wished to be an author (though I wished that too), as that I vowed I would learn to write. That was a proficiency that tempted me; and I practised to acquire it, as men learn to whittle, in a wager with myself.' All this occurred out of doors. At home he continued his attempts with somewhat better results: 'Whenever I read a book or a passage that pleased me,

[1] William Allingham, *A Diary*, p. 334.

in which a thing was said or an effect rendered with propriety, in which there was either some conspicuous force or some happy distinction in the style, I must sit down at once and set myself to ape that quality. I was unsuccessful, and I knew it, and tried again, and was again unsuccessful, and always unsuccessful; but at least, in these vain bouts, I got some practice in rhythm, in harmony, in construction and the co-ordination of parts. I have thus played the sedulous ape to Hazlitt, to Lamb, to Wordsworth, to Sir Thomas Browne, to Defoe, to Hawthorne, to Montaigne, to Baudelaire, and to Obermann.'

From this confession we see that Stevenson worked consciously and industriously to learn to write, and that he attained his goal through imitation of the masters of style, through 'ventriloquial efforts.' In his sixth year he dictated a Life of Moses, in his ninth he described his journey in Perth, in his thirteenth he undertook to do justice to the inhabitants of Peebles after the fashion of the *Book of Snobs*. When he was sixteen years old (1866) his first printed work appeared, a pamphlet about the insurrection in the Pentlands; in his twentieth and twenty-first years he wrote several essays, which later appeared together in the Edinburgh Edition; about the same time he also brought out a few articles in the *Edinburgh University Magazine*. In his twenty-third year he openly appeared in the *Portfolio* with an essay on *Roads*, in which he gave proof that he was already master of his art. From this time on, he constantly had articles in various periodicals; and in May, 1878, his first book, *An Inland Voyage*, came out. Such diligent creation evinces a very careful and profitable period of study, during which he imitated

the prose writers and the poets of various centuries, and practised in all kinds of stylistic tones, in order to learn 'to preserve a fitting key of words,' such as the easy tone in *An Apology for Idlers*, or as the serious one in *Old Mortality*. Not until he had passed through this severe course of training did he attain success, with 'legions of words swarming to his call, dozens of turns of phrase simultaneously bidding for his choice.'

This great industry, this conscientious application, which were so characteristic of Stevenson in his youth, remained with him throughout his whole life. Only seldom could he say, as he did in reference to *Treasure Island*, that words flowed from his pen in the effortless manner in which easy conversation comes from the lips. He polished his prose as Tennyson did his poetry, and only let work of the best quality go from his hands. In the *Vailima Letters* he writes as follows: 'In the South Sea book I have fifty pages copied fair, some of which has been four times, and all twice written; certainly fifty pages of solid scriving inside a fortnight.' Further on he says: 'As for my damned literature, God knows what a business it is, grinding along without a scrap of inspiration or a note of style. . . . The last two chapters [*The South Sea Letters*] have taken me considerably over a month, and they are still beneath pity.' Still further: 'But it [*The Ebb Tide*] goes slowly, as you may judge from the fact that this three weeks past I have only struggled from page 58 to page 82; twenty-four pages, *et encore* sure to be rewritten, in twenty-one days. This is no prize-taker; not much Waverley Novels about this!' And to conclude: 'I was a living half-hour

upon a single clause, and have a gallery of variants that would surprise you.'

One might, accordingly, object to Stevenson that his style is not natural, and therefore not good; but this charge he angrily refutes in his essay on style, in these words: 'That style is therefore the most perfect, not, as fools say, which is the most natural, for the most natural is the disjointed babble of the chronicler; but which attains the highest degree of elegant and pregnant implication unobtrusively; or if obtrusively, then with the greatest gain to sense and vigor.' And again in *Memories and Portraits*, where he meets the charge of a want of originality, consequent upon the confession of his imitative attempts: 'Perhaps I hear some one cry out: "But this is not the way to be original!" It is not; nor is there any way but to be born so. Nor yet, if you are born original, is there anything in this training that shall clip the wings of your originality.' [1]

## XVI. LAFCADIO HEARN

Yet the clothing in words was no small task, as witness the accompanying examples [facsimile specimens of original manuscript] of how he labored for the perfection of his vehicle. These are not the first struggles of a young and clumsy artist, but the efforts at the age of fifty-three of one of the greatest masters of English.

It was done, too, by a man who earned with his pen in a year less than the week's income of one of the facile authors of the 'six best sellers.'

[1] W. P. Chalmers, *Charakteristische Eigenschaften von R. L. Stevenson's Stil*, pp. 1–4. Marburg, 1903.

As has been said of De Quincey, whom Hearn in many ways resembled: 'I can grasp a little of his morbid suffering in the eternal struggle for perfection of utterance; I can share a part of his aesthetic torment over cacophony, redundance, obscurity, and all the thousand minute delicacies and subtleties of resonance and dissonance, accent and caesura, that only a De Quincey's ear appreciates and seeks to achieve or evade. How many care for these fine things to-day? How many are concerned if De Quincey uses a word with a long "a" sound, or spends a sleepless night in his endeavor to find another with the short "a," that shall at once answer his purpose, and crown his sentence with harmony? Who lovingly examine the great artist's methods now, dip into the secret of his mystery, and weigh verb against adjective, vowel against consonant, that they may a little understand the unique splendor of this prose? And who, when an artist is the matter, attempt to measure his hopes as well as his attainments, or praise a noble ambition perhaps shining through faulty attempt? How many, even among those who write, have fathomed the toil and suffering, the continence and self-denial of our great artists in words?'[1]

[1] Elizabeth Bisland, *Life and Letters of Lafcadio Hearn* 1. 132–135.

## XVII. JOWETT

His theory of preaching was not to read largely, or to go through a long elaboration of thought for the special occasion, but to take some subject which he had already worked out both in thought and in experience, and to write it as the direct product of his mind and heart. But he was extremely careful, even fastidious, in the expression of his thoughts; and in this, as in every part of his work, he gave himself incredible pains, as is evidenced by the alterations, erasures, and additions in the manuscript. Even the revising of an old sermon cost him much. His sense of the importance of care and trouble in such matters made him unwilling to publish; and when, in the last two years of his life, in response to the request of his old pupils in 1892, he set to work to go over his sermons for publication, he was often driven to rewrite with great difficulty. In one case he makes the following note: 'This is the eighth time I have tried to rewrite this sermon and have failed.'[1]

## XVIII. BALZAC

We have said that Balzac wrought laboriously, and, an obstinate caster, ten or a dozen times expelled from his crucible the metal which had not exactly filled the mold. Like Bernard Palissy, he would have burned his furniture, his floor, and even the beams of his house, to keep up the fire of his furnace, so as not to fail in his experiment; the most rigid necessities never made him deliver

[1] Jowett, *College Sermons*, Preface, pp. vii–viii.

a work to his publisher upon which he had not expended his utmost effort, and he gave admirable examples of literary conscientiousness. His corrections, so numerous that they were almost equivalent to different editions of the same idea, were charged to his account by the publishers, and his compensation, often moderate for the value of the work and the trouble it had cost him, was diminished in proportion. The promised sums did not always arrive when due, and to sustain what he laughingly called his floating debt, Balzac displayed prodigious resources of mind, and an activity which would have completely absorbed the life of an ordinary man.

But when, seated before his table in his friar's frock, in the midst of the nocturnal silence, he found himself face to face with blank sheets, upon which was projected the light of his luminary of seven candles concentrated by a shade, taking pen in hand, he forgot all. And then commenced a conflict more terrible than the conflict of Jacob with the angel — that between the form and the idea. From those battles of each night, at morn he issued broken but victorious; the fire having gone out, and the atmosphere of his room being chilled, his head smoked, and his body exhaled a mist visible as that from the bodies of horses in the winter season. Sometimes a single phrase would occupy him for an entire sitting; it was appraised and re-appraised, twisted, kneaded, hammered, lengthened, abbreviated — written in a hundred different fashions; and, strangest thing of all! the necessary, absolute form presented itself only after the exhaustion of all the approximate forms. Doubtless the metal often cooled in a fuller and thicker cast, but

there are very few pages in Balzac which have remained identical with the first draft.

His manner of procedure was this: When he had for a long time borne and lived a subject, in a handwriting rapid, involved, illegible, almost hieroglyphical, he traced a sort of scenario of a few pages, which he sent to the printers, who returned them in isolated columns in the midst of large sheets. He read carefully these columns, which already gave to the embryo of his work that impersonal character which manuscript does not have, and he applied to this rough sketch that critical faculty he possessed in so eminent a degree, treating his own work as if it were the work of another. He approved or he disapproved, he confirmed or he corrected; but he always added lines issuing from the beginning, the middle, or the end of phrases; and directed toward the margins, to the right, the left, the top, the bottom, lines leading to new developments, to insertions, to incidental phrases, to epithets, to adverbs. At the end of some hours of work one would have called his proof-sheet a bouquet of fireworks designed by a child. From the primitive text shot forth rockets of style which blazed on all sides. Then there were simple crosses, and crosses recrossed like those of heraldry, stars, suns, figures Arabic and Roman, letters Greek or French — all imaginable signs of reference. Strips of paper fastened on with wafers or pins added to the insufficient margins, and these were striped with lines in fine characters for want of space, and full themselves of erasures; for the correction scarce made was at once corrected. The printed column was almost lost in the midst of this conjuring book of cabalistic appearance,

which the compositors passed from hand to hand, each willing to work only an hour upon Balzac.

The next day they sent back the proofs, with the corrections made, and augmented by half.

Balzac would again set to work, amplifying always, adding a feature, a detail, a description, an observation upon manners, a characteristic word, a phrase for effect, uniting the idea more closely with the form, always approaching nearer his interior design, choosing, like a painter, the definite outline from three or four contours. Often this terrible work having been accomplished with that intensity of application of which he alone was capable, he would perceive that the thought had been awkwardly expressed, that an episode predominated, that a figure he wished secondary for the general effect did not accord with his plan — and with one dash of the pen he would courageously demolish the result of four or five nights' work. He was heroic in these circumstances.

Six, seven, and sometimes ten, proofs were sent back, with erasures and retouches, without satisfying this author's desire for perfection. We have seen at Les Jardies, upon the shelves of a library composed of his works alone, the different proofs of the same work, from the first sketch to the published book, each volume bound separately. The comparison of Balzac's thought at its different stages offers a very curious study, and must contain profitable literary lessons.[1]

[1] Théophile Gautier, *Honoré de Balzac* (*Famous French Authors*, New York, 1879, pp. 204–207).

# V

# ON THE STUDIES OF POETS

## I. A GLANCE AT WORDSWORTH'S READING[1]

To his average acquaintance Wordsworth is a comforting type of poet; in order to appreciate him, it would seem, one does not need to know very much. Whatever he may be to a learned intimate like Mr. Thomas Hutchinson, to the labor-shunning dilettante — and even to many a serious student of English literature — the poet of Rydal Mount is a great non-reading seer of 'nature,' uninfluenced by books and neglectful of bookish lore, a genius who in a peculiar sense may be contemplated apart, and fully understood without recourse to conventional and irksome scholarly helps. Insisting very properly upon accurate first-hand observation of the outer world as a basis (though not the only basis) for poetical imagery, he owes, if we accept the prevalent view, no literary debts such as Shakespeare and Milton patently display, and Tennyson, for all his occasional demurring, may be forced to acknowledge. 'He had,' affirms Lord Morley, echoing Emerson, 'no teachers nor inspirers save nature and solitude.'[2] Could anything be more

[1] By Lane Cooper. See p. 132, note 2.

[2] *Studies in Literature*, p. 5. Compare Emerson, *English Traits* (*Complete Works*, Riverside Edition, 5. 243): 'He [Wordsworth] had no master but nature and solitude.'

explicit? The late Professor Dowden, it is true, a well-schooled Wordsworthian, put the case more gently: 'He read what pleased him, and what he considered best, but he had not the wide-ranging passion for books of a literary student';[1] the veteran critic of Dublin would never have agreed with Lord Morley's surprising verdict as it stands, yet even he may not have been unbiased by traditional opinion. Dr. Brandes, of course, acquires his ideas about the 'Lake School' in the main from popular sources, and utters nothing new when he asserts that 'Wordsworth would never describe anything with which he was not perfectly familiar'; a statement that seems to be corroborated by a later hierophant of the poet, Professor Raleigh, who speaks thus: 'It is the interest of Wordsworth's career, studied as an episode in literary history, that it takes us at once to the root of the matter, and shows us the genesis of poetry from its living material, without literary intermediary. . . . The dominant passion of Wordsworth's life owed nothing to books.'[2]

He had no teachers, no inspirers, save nature and solitude! The dominant impulse of his life, the poetical impulse, owed nothing to books! Is it profitable to trace the growth of so untenable a paradox, a paradox which Wordsworth, most sensible and straightforward of men, would have been the first to deny? In the main its causes have been three. First, there is the usual reluctance of the uninitiated to credit any genius with the need of external assistance in his work, and an

[1] *Poems by Wordsworth* (ed. Dowden), 1898, p. xxxvii.
[2] Walter Raleigh, *Wordsworth*, 1903, pp. 44, 45.

allied indolent reluctance of half-initiated criticasters to grant that studying his 'sources' — the books that he 'devoured, or studiously perused' — will ever aid us in understanding a seer; as if we did not need a poet's education in order to look with a poet's eyes. Secondly, and in particular, there has been a persistent misinterpretation of two of Wordsworth's minor pieces, namely, *Expostulation and Reply* and *The Tables Turned*, in which hasty readers have fancied that the poet records permanent, not transient, moods; that he is wholly in earnest, not half-playful; that he is speaking in his own character, not in two imaginatively assumed voices; and that here he seriously and finally disclaims all inspiration from the great nature that exists in established art and science. In *The Prelude*, where he aims at strict autobiography, Wordsworth may be relied on for a true account of his usual reaction to the world of books; and in that poem, if we listen with care, he tells the story of his indebtedness to literary influence — of the constant relation between a great and happy poet and the best and happiest hours of the past.

Thirdly, there is a cause of widespread misapprehension about Wordsworth as a student of both poetry and science in the following circumstance: the popular conception neglects his earlier life, when he read much, for his later, when he necessarily read less. The conventional sketch by Brandes[1] is a caricature of Wordsworth's personality in after-years, when most of his work was done, and when, having become a well-known literary figure, he was sought out by the lion-hunters. As he grew

[1] *Main Currents* 4. 43 ff.

older, Wordsworth doubtless gave relatively less time to books. Increasing social demands, repeated prostrations by bereavement, occasional visits in London, and various tours on the Continent must latterly have made substantial inroads upon such leisure as he might otherwise, perhaps, have employed in study. However, as the years went by, a vital hindrance to protracted scholarly pursuits arose in his failing eyesight. A weakness of the eyes had, indeed, helped to deter Wordsworth as a young man, uncertain of his future, from 'taking orders' or entering a learned profession like the law. If his vision subsequently was better when he began definitely to prepare himself for the career of a poet, it was in all probability overtaxed by the scholarly part of that preparation. Wordsworth must have suffered from some sort of ophthalmic defect nearly all his life. By the time he was fifty or sixty years old, though his general health was robust, his eyes were ruined; and ruined not wholly by the clerical tasks incidental to composition, since members of his family had always relieved him of a certain amount of copying. In the *Atlantic Monthly* for February, 1906, Mr. W. C. Hazlitt printed a letter from Wordsworth to Lamb (dated Sunday, January 10th, 1830), an extract from which discloses one good reason why the poet of Rydal Mount could not indulge 'the wide-ranging passion for books of a literary student': 'My dear Lamb: . . . Your present of Hone's book was very acceptable . . . I wished to enter a little minutely into notice of the dramatic extracts, and on account of the smallness of the print deferred doing so till longer days would allow one to

read without candlelight, which I have long since given up. But alas! when the days lengthened, my eyesight departed; and for many months I could not read three minutes at a time. You will be sorry to hear that this infirmity still hangs about me, and almost cuts me off from reading altogether.'

'His eyes, alas!' adds his sister in a postscript, 'are very weak, and so will, I fear, remain through life; but with proper care he does not suffer much.'[1]

For this reason alone it may be very unjust to intimate, as F. W. H. Myers and Lord Morley have done, that Wordsworth regarded the work of his later contemporaries with great indifference: 'Byron and Shelley he seems scarcely to have read; and he failed altogether to appreciate Keats.'[2] In point of fact, all three of these authors were on Wordsworth's book-shelves when he died. Two of them certainly, Byron and Shelley, he had read, at least in part, with care — Shelley, as Morley's *Life of Gladstone* shows, with distinct admiration. Under the circumstances, little discredit might attach to Wordsworth, when he considered how his light was spent, had he not read them at all, but given his attention to what pleased him more, and what he considered best — to Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton. In reality, it is astonishing how well he kept up with current poetry even late in his career; and it is strange and unfortunate that he has been misrepresented as quite

[1] See also *Letters of the Wordsworth Family* (ed. Knight) 2. 405–406.

[2] Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, with an Introduction by John Morley, p. lii. In *Studies in Literature*, where Lord Morley has reprinted this Introduction as a separate essay, the sentence from Myers is omitted.

apathetic to the literary productions of others (not to mention works of science) all his life, when his eyesight was much impaired during the last thirty or forty years of it. I never have read an estimate of Wordsworth in which this infirmity was properly considered. His critics seem to have tacitly assumed that a man who 'would never describe anything with which he was not perfectly familiar' must have been blessed with unfailing eyesight.

Other circumstances doubtless have had a share in sustaining the comfortable paradox of Professor Raleigh. For example, the irregularity of Wordsworth's studies at Cambridge, though it disquieted him at the time, and though he afterwards condemned and lamented it, apparently has been taken as fairly indicating the measure of his ultimate attainments. Yet his attainments at Cambridge were at once more solid and more extensive than most of his followers have realized. Just after he received his Bachelor's degree his sister wrote: 'William lost the chance, indeed the certainty, of a fellowship, by not combating his inclinations. He gave way to his natural dislike to studies so dry as many parts of mathematics, consequently could not succeed at Cambridge. He reads Italian, Spanish, French, Greek, Latin, and English, but never opens a mathematical book.'[1] Accordingly, any censure of this period in his life comes less appropriately from some of those who have written about him than from the poet himself; referring to the earlier part of his residence at college, he says:

[1] Letter of Dorothy Wordsworth to Jane Pollard, June 26, 1791. (*Letters of the Wordsworth Family* 1. 28.)

Not that I slighted books — that were to lack
All sense, — but other passions in me ruled,
Passions more fervent, making me less prompt
To indoor study than was wise or well,
Or suited to those years.[1]

And again, referring to the latter part:

The bonds of indolent society
Relaxing in their hold, henceforth I lived
More to myself. Two winters may be passed
Without a separate notice: many books
Were skimmed, devoured, or studiously perused,
But with no settled plan.[2]

Between those winters at Cambridge and the time when he penned such lines as these, Wordsworth must have undergone a change of heart toward 'indoor study' after a 'settled plan.' In the present article it is the interest of Wordsworth's career, taken as a crucial instance of the relation between poetry and scholarship, that it shows us a definite attempt by the great English poet of nature to supply in the prime of life what he considered a defect in his literary training hitherto, in order to fit himself for success in the world of letters. It is true (unless he himself is mistaken), even at Cambridge he had imaginative glimpses of the training that he needed:

Yet I, though used
In magisterial liberty to rove,
Culling such flowers of learning as might tempt
A random choice, could shadow forth a place
(If now I yield not to a flattering dream)
Whose studious aspect should have bent me down
To instantaneous service; should at once

[1] *Prelude* 3. 364 ff. [2] *Prelude* 6. 20 ff.

> Have made me pay to science and to arts
> And written lore, acknowledged my liege lord,
> A homage frankly offered up, like that
> Which I had paid to Nature.[1]

However, it was not, I think, during the years of unrest immediately succeeding the 'deep vacation' of his residence at the university that Wordsworth's intellectual conversion, if we may so style it, was finally accomplished; not until after his settlement at Racedown; not, perhaps, until his friendship with the polymath Coleridge had been cemented. We may assume that this conversion was not unrelated to the 'moral crisis' which he passed through after his return from France, or to the attendant change in his general attitude to life, which has been described with penetration by Professor Legouis.[2] On the other hand, that Wordsworth, whether rapidly or gradually, had learned the spirit and practice of a more systematic toil among books by the time he began to write *The Prelude* is, I am convinced, unquestionable. Five years later, when he was bringing that poem to a close, and when he felt himself competent to pass judgment on the motive forces of the French Revolution, he was well aware through what sort of literary investigation true insight into history must be won. At a prior stage of development, so he says:

> Like others, I had skimmed, and sometimes read
> With care, the master-pamphlets of the day;
> Nor wanted such half-insight as grew wild
> Upon that meagre soil, helped out by talk
> And public news.[3]

[1] *Prelude* 3. 368 ff.
[2] Émile Legouis, *The Early Life of William Wordsworth*, pp. 253 ff.
[3] *Prelude* 9. 96 ff.

But it is not with any of his special studies in history, of whatever time, that we have here to do. For the moment, our inquiry concerns his more general literary activities subsequent to his establishment at Racedown in 1796.

Briefly, the case seems to be this. Sometime after the legacy from Calvert had put within actual reach Wordsworth's ideal of a life devoted to poetry, and yet, as we have hinted above, possibly not until his intimacy with the erudite Coleridge began, Wordsworth came to realize that his previous literary and scientific schooling had been inadequate, and he shortly bent himself to the Miltonic task of 'industrious and select reading,' in conscious preparation for his chosen career. Face to face with the project of an ample philosophic poem upon nature, man, and human society, though undecided on its exact subject-matter, he felt the need of supplementing and enriching his individual experience; and hence, being a genius possessed of eminent good sense, he disdained none of the obvious means to culture. The dominant impulse of Wordsworth's life shows the normal debt of poetry to books.

One recalls his mature advice to his nephew: 'Remember, first read the ancient classical authors; then come to us; and you will be able to judge for yourself which of us is worth reading.'[1] Still more significant is the remark he made to Crabb Robinson: 'When I began to give myself up to the profession of a poet for life, I was impressed with a conviction that there were four English poets whom I must have continually before me as examples — Chaucer, Shakespeare, Spenser, and Milton.

[1] Christopher Wordsworth, *Memoirs of Wordsworth* 2. 467.

These I must study, and equal if I could; and I need not think of the rest.' If we had no other way of gauging Wordsworth's attention to these four, we might measure it by the evidences of his actual attention to 'the rest.' 'I have been charged by some,' he added, 'with disparaging Pope and Dryden. This is not so. I have committed much of both to memory.'[1] And when Hazlitt wrote in *The Spirit of the Age*: 'It is mortifying to hear him speak of Pope and Dryden, whom, because they have been supposed to have all the possible excellencies of poetry, he will allow to have none'; Wordsworth rejoined, privately: 'Monstrous! . . . I have ten times [more] knowledge of Pope's writings, and of Dryden's also, than this writer ever had. To this day [1836] I believe I could repeat, with a little rummaging of my memory, several thousand lines of Pope.'[2] If we look into the question, Wordsworth's familiarity with the lesser English poets becomes astonishing; for neither the extent of his acquaintance with them, as indicated, for example, in his prefaces, nor the strength of his verbal memory, just noted, has been commonly recognized. In some minds there seems to be an impression that his sole guiding star was Anne, Countess of Winchelsea.

But it is not within the scope of the present study to consider the possible influence of Chaucer, or Spenser, or Shakespeare, or Milton on Wordsworth, not to mention that of men like Drayton, or Herbert, or Thomson, or Bowles; or to investigate the problem of his debt as a

[1] Christopher Wordsworth, *Memoirs of Wordsworth* 2. 470.

[2] William Knight, *Wordsworth and Barron Field*, in the *Academy*, December 23, 1905.

meditative poet to his favorite in Latin literature, the moral Horace; or to mark his observation as a rural poet of models among the pastoral writers including and preceding Spenser, although, as we have seen, Wordsworth's own advice is to consult 'the ancient classical authors' — in this case Theocritus and Virgil — as a preliminary to understanding him. It is enough to affirm that, for every type of production he essayed, Wordsworth had the best examples continually before him as guides; Shakespeare's Edgar as in some sense a model for the hero of *The Idiot Boy*; Aeschylus, Horace, and Gray as furnishing standards for the *Ode to Duty*; and so on. Nor, on the other hand, is it possible here, even in a general way, to take account of his devotion to science, which grew strong after his removal to Racedown, and of which we have striking evidences for the period of his residence at Alfoxden. We know that he now betook himself to mathematics, which at Cambridge he had neglected; that he became familiar with works like those of Linnaeus; and that he was interested in medical treatises such as the *Zoönomia* of Erasmus Darwin. We gather, too, that the severe beauty of 'geometric truth,' pursued after the example of Milton, was in course of time reflected in the *Ode to Duty*; that the poet's naïve contemplation of flowers was fortified by an acquaintance with systematic botany; and that from technical sources like the *Zoönomia* he drew information on the psychology of the abnormal, which he presently used to advantage in ballads like *Goody Blake* and *The Idiot Boy*. In representing the action of the human mind under stress and strain, he constantly betrays an acquaintance with the theory of association advanced

by David Hartley. Wordsworth's formula in the Preface of 1800 has become classic: 'Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; it is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all Science.' Can any one really suppose that a man of Wordsworth's sincerity, believing this, would have tried to write poetry if he had no science? Nor, furthermore, dare we grapple with the problem of Wordsworth's avidity for modern languages — for French, which he used much more easily than the learned Coleridge, or for German, which he could hardly have spoken worse than did Coleridge. We may note, as a symptom, that by the time he visited Goslar to practice German, Wordsworth was ready to take up 'Norse' as well; compare the poem beginning:

A plague on your languages, German and Norse!

On the whole, it is safe to assert that in linguistic accomplishments he was not inferior to the translator of *Wallenstein*; and perhaps the day is coming when we shall discover that not merely in this, but in more than one other direction, the author of the *Ode to Duty*, who often depreciates his own acquisitions, was a more systematic student than the 'myriad-minded' but desultory Coleridge. As M. Aynard judiciously observes, the habit of pretending to encyclopaedic knowledge was a malady of the romantic spirit.[1] From this malady Wordsworth was exempt.

In any case, our poet's reading after 1795, and more particularly about 1797–1798, was various and extensive — so extensive as to call for industry on the part of any one who tries to duplicate it; and was chosen as an aid,

[1] *Revue Germanique* I. 126.

direct or indirect, to literary composition. In the present article we can only touch upon a single aspect of his indebtedness to books; and the study must be regarded as preliminary rather than finished. However, any new ray of light upon Wordsworth's activities shortly before the publication of *Lyrical Ballads* is likely to prove welcome.

In recounting the origin of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Wordsworth has told us that the fateful death of the Albatross was a direct suggestion to Coleridge from him. He had been reading about this ominous bird in *Shelvocke's Voyages*, a book, he significantly adds, 'which probably Coleridge never saw.'[1] Now Coleridge's acquaintance with books of travel may be set down as reasonably wide; at all events it was not merely 'casual,' as M. Legouis has termed it.[2] Was Wordsworth's acquaintance wider? If so, there is nevertheless something more strange than that. Here is Wordsworth, who 'would never describe anything with which he was not perfectly familiar,' caught in the act of imaging for Coleridge, and for a poem in which the two were collaborating, a creature which in all probability neither could have seen in the flesh; drawing inspiration, not from 'nature' or 'solitude,' but from a stirring narrative of adventure and discovery; and, in a capital instance, clearly exhibiting the 'genesis of poetry' out of dead (?) material, with an eighteenth-century sea-captain for 'literary intermediary.'

George Shelvocke's *A Voyage round the World by the Way of the Great South Sea* (London, 1726) was 'Perform'd,' as the title-page records, 'in the Years 1719, 20,

[1] *Poetical Works of Coleridge* (ed. Campbell), p. 594.
[2] *The Early Life of Wordsworth*, p. 422.

21, 22, in the *Speedwell* of London, of 24 Guns and 100 Men, (Under His Majesty's Commission to cruize on the Spaniards in the late War with the Spanish Crown) till she was cast away on the Island of Juan Fernandes, in May, 1720; and afterwards continu'd in the *Recovery*, the *Jesus Maria* and *Sacra Familia*, etc.' The book illustrates one main direction in Wordsworth's studies during his outwardly quiet life at Alfoxden. Prior to his departure for Germany in 1798, he had probably worked through dozens of similar narratives, whether of wanderings by sea or of adventures in distant lands; for, aside from the fact that they were congenial to his roving and impetuous imagination, such accounts described for him in 'the language of real men' — men who were first-hand and ardent observers of nature — regions which the poet could never himself hope to traverse, but with which, for specific purposes, he wished to be acquainted. 'Of the amassing of knowledge,' remarks Professor Raleigh, '. . . he had always thought lightly.' The dates are for the most part impossible to fix, but within a very few years Wordsworth read accounts of Dalecarlia, Lapland, and northern Siberia; he studied in some form the physical geography of portions of south-eastern Europe; he made acquaintance, it seems, with Wilson's *Pelew Islands*;[1] he read Hearne's *Hudson's Bay* 'with deep interest,'[2] and knew the Great Lakes through the *Travels* of Jonathan Carver.[3]

[1] Cf. *Athenaeum*, 1905, 1. 498.

[2] Wordsworth, *Poetical Works*, with an Introduction by John Morley, p. 85.

[3] See *Poems by Wordsworth* (ed. Dowden), 1898, pp. 418, 419; and compare *Wordsworth's Guide to the Lakes* (ed. E. de Sélincourt, 1906), pp. 39, 176–177.

If he did not carry Bartram's *Travels* in Georgia, Florida, etc., with him to Germany, he must have had that entertaining journal almost by heart before he started.[1] In this book, of course, his interest in travel was re-enforced by his interest in botany. It is clear that he was acquainted also with the much earlier and more fiery expedition to Florida of Dominique de Gourgues;[2] and, if so, he had access less probably to the original of Basanier than to the translation in Hakluyt's *Principal Navigations*. In that case it would be hard to say where his delvings in itineraries ceased. In the meantime his friend and teacher, Coleridge, was busy with tomes like the *Pilgrimage* of Samuel Purchas, Hakluyt's industrious successor, and the *Strange and Dangerous Voyage* of Captain James, not to speak of Bartram and others. Sixty years afterward, in the catalogue made up for a posthumous sale of Wordsworth's library at Rydal Mount, we find not only Purchas, Hearne, and Shelvocke, but, besides a very considerable array of travels published after the year 1800, more than twenty such titles as the following: Bianchi's *Account of Switzerland* (1710); Buchanan, Rev. J. L., *Travels in the Western Hebrides* (1793); Burnet, Gilbert, *Travels in France, Italy, Germany, and Switzerland* (1762); Busbequius' *Travels into Turkey* (1744); *An Account of Denmark as it was in 1692* (1694); Howell's *Instructions for Forreine Travell* (1650); *Account of the Kingdom of Hungary* (1717); Mavor, Rev. W., *Collection of Voyages, Travels, and Discoveries, from the Time of Columbus to the Present* (1796, etc.), twenty-one volumes; *Account of*

[1] Cf. *Athenaeum*, 1905, 1. 498 ff.
[2] Cf. *Prelude* 1. 206 ff.

*Voyages to the South and North, by Sir John Narborough and others* (1694); *Voyages and Travels, Some now first printed from Original Manuscripts, others now first published in English, with Introductory Discourse supposed to be written by the celebrated Mr. Locke* (1744), five volumes; Psalmanazar's *Description of Formosa* (1794); Ray, John, F.R.S., *Observations made in a Journey in the Low Countries, Germany and France* (1673); *Travels in Divers Parts of Europe*, etc., etc., *with Observations on the Gold, Silver, Copper, Quicksilver and Other Mines*, etc. (1687); *Vocabulary of Sea Phrases*, etc. (1799). It is reasonable to assume that if Wordsworth knew Shelvocke and Hearne before 1800, he knew at least a few of these works too. It is clear also that not all of his collection of travels and voyages can be found in the catalogue of sale in 1859.[1] For example, Bruce's *Travels to Discover the Sources of the Nile* (1790) is wanting; yet Wordsworth certainly owned a copy of this book, since in the memoranda that he tried to keep at Rydal Mount of all volumes borrowed from his shelves, one entry records the lending of Bruce.[2] Further, no one can say to what limit the poet's own borrowing of books may not have gone before he had money to buy them with any degree of freedom. In middle life, or at all events in a letter that may belong to the year 1811, he wrote to Archdeacon Wrangham: 'I see no new books except by the merest accident. . . . You inquire about old books; you might almost as well have asked for my teeth as for any of

[1] See *Transactions of the Wordsworth Society* 6. 197–257.

[2] The manuscript of these memoranda is now part of the Harry Elkins Widener collection in the Harvard University Library.

mine. The only modern books that I read are those of travels, or such as relate to matters of fact — and the only modern books that I care for; but as to old ones I am like yourself — scarcely anything comes amiss to me. The little time I have to spare — the very little, I may say — all goes that way.'[1] Unfortunately I have been unable to consult all of the works that I am aware the poet knew even prior to 1799.

The external evidence on the reading of both Wordsworth and Coleridge during their fruitful intimacy in Somerset, and later at Grasmere, is, in fact, very fragmentary. Tradition pictures the two men wandering with Dorothy Wordsworth in the beautiful country-side around Alfoxden, Coleridge apparently as heedless of 'indoor study' as Wordsworth himself. The 'indoor,' or bookish, history of that episode, so critical in their lives and in English literature, has aroused no general curiosity, and has sunk into undeserved oblivion. Sufficient pains, however, might yet reconstruct a valuable outline. We say 'bookish,' rather than 'indoor,' for Wordsworth not only composed in the open, but by day did much of his reading there — partly, perhaps, on account of his eyes. Of his ways in the North he tells us the following story: 'One day a stranger, having walked round the garden and grounds of Rydal Mount, asked one of the female servants, who happened to be at the door, permission to see her master's study. "This," said she, leading him forward, "is my master's library, where he keeps his books, but his study is out of doors."'[2]

[1] *Letters of the Wordsworth Family* (ed. Knight) 2. 128.
[2] Wordsworth, *Poetical Works* (ed. Morley), p. 564.

But with reference to books of travel and the like: judged chiefly from scattered hints in contemporary or slightly subsequent poems, Wordsworth's studies in descriptive geography during the first few years after his establishment at Racedown, in 1795, seem to have extended from some unidentified notice of our Western prairies to an account of the Andes, perhaps in the record of the Spanish priest Molina, thence to the Straits of Magellan and Le Maire, thence to the Canaries, thence to the heart of Abyssinia, a region which he knew probably in the pages of the intrepid explorer Bruce, if not likewise in Dr. Johnson's translation of Lobo,[1] and so on to Tartary and Cathay, as pictured by those whom he calls the 'pilgrim friars' — among them doubtless Odoric. Our survey intentionally neglects itineraries dealing with Great Britain and parts of the Continent that Wordsworth visited in person, although his use of such itineraries cannot be questioned, any more than their effect upon what he wrote. He had commenced such borrowings even before 1793; in a note to line 307 of *Descriptive Sketches* he remarks: 'For most of the images in the next sixteen verses, I am indebted to M. Raymond's interesting observations annexed to his translation of Coxe's Tour in Switzerland.'[2]

Whatever the extent and solidity of this reading, its purpose must not be mistaken. I quote the poet's own opinion on the importance of the literature of travel as an 'intermediary' in the 'genesis' of his poetry. Writing

[1] He was familiar with *Rasselas*. Cf. *Wordsworth's Guide to the Lakes* (ed. E. de Sélincourt, 1906), p. 48.

[2] This indebtedness is much more extensive than Wordsworth indicates. See Legouis, *The Early Life of Wordsworth*, pp. 475–477.

from Alfoxden on the sixth of March, 1798, six months, it will be observed, before the publication of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth says to his friend James Tobin: 'If you could collect for me any books of travel, you would render me an essential service, as without much of such reading my present labors cannot be brought to any conclusion.'

By his 'present labors' Wordsworth meant the great poem which was to be the main work of his life; this poem he had by that time commenced, but was destined never to organize as a perfect and unified whole. Five days after his letter to Tobin he informs another friend, a Mr. Losh of Cumberland: 'I have been tolerably industrious within the last few weeks; I have written 706 lines of a poem which I hope to make of considerable utility. Its title will be *The Recluse, or Views of Nature, Man, and Society*.'[1] Why Wordsworth was never able to complete this work as he designed is a large question that may not be broached at present. It was carefully treated by the late Professor Minto in *The Nineteenth Century* for September, 1889; yet there is more to be said. Parenthetically, we might offer as one possible reason for 'Wordsworth's great failure'[2] the very fact that he began his direct preparation somewhat late, and that, unlike his grand exemplar, Milton, he was unduly impatient to produce on a large scale. And we may add as another reason the fact that, again unlike Milton, Chaucer, Spenser, and Shakespeare, he sundered his poetical activity too far from the practical life of his nation. However

[1] Knight, *Life of Wordsworth* 1. 148.

[2] *Wordsworth's Great Failure, in The Nineteenth Century* 26. 435–451.

that may be, Wordsworth's great tripartite poem is now represented to us by a body of verse that, noble as it may be, is nevertheless, as a whole, structurally imperfect. In his own opinion, at any rate, it is imperfect in such sense as an unfinished 'Gothic church' may be so deemed; it consists, first, of an 'ante-chapel,' *The Prelude*, so-called; secondly, of parts of the main structure, namely, *The Recluse*, so-called, and *The Excursion*; thirdly, of most, if not all, of the shorter pieces — 'little cells, oratories, and sepulchral recesses' — produced by Wordsworth between 1797, or earlier, and 1814. The figure from architecture is the poet's own.[1] We are entitled, however, to regard many of his briefer poems as material which he was desirous of ultimately using in the construction of the 'nave' (had he been destined ever to complete this), and not as mere side-chapels in his imaginary cathedral.

The effect of Wordsworth's reading of travels is discernible throughout this poetry; it may be detected in some of his best and most familiar passages. The Prologue to *Peter Bell* is full of its influence; indeed the whole poem, being in fact Wordsworth's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* — that is, the ballad of a wanderer, which he evolved when he had found himself unable to compose jointly with Coleridge — breathes the spirit of a born and bred peripatetic. A tinge from the American naturalist William Bartram is visible in the lines *There was a Boy*, in the *Stanzas written in my Pocket-Copy of Thomson's 'Castle of Indolence,'* in *She was a Phantom of Delight*, in parts of *The Prelude* and *The Recluse*, and perhaps in *The Excursion*. *Ruth* in places follows

[1] Wordsworth, *Poetical Works* (ed. Morley), p. 415.

Bartram word for word. *The Affliction of Margaret* — almost certainly carries a reminiscence of Wilson's *Pelew Islands*. *The Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman* is confessedly founded on Hearne. Something from Carver lurks in the exquisite lines on that 'faery voyager,' Hartley Coleridge at the age of six, and appears at least once in *The Excursion*.[1] In Book Eighth of *The Prelude* it may be one of the mediaeval 'pilgrim friars' mentioned in Book Seventh that furnishes Wordsworth with his marvelous vision of the Mongolian paradise Jehol. — There seems to be an instructive parallel here to Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*, which sprang from his remembrance of mediaeval lore gathered together in *Purchas his Pilgrimage*. Such reading helps to explain the continual references in Wordsworth to distant lands and seas in general; for instance:

> The ante-chapel where the statue stood
> Of Newton with his prism and silent face,
> The marble index of a mind for ever
> Voyaging through strange seas of Thought, alone;[2]

lines, accordingly, whose inspiration is to be attributed not entirely to 'the equally happy lines' in Thomson's *Death of Isaac Newton*.[3] It throws light also upon his frequent allusions to wanderers, sea-captains, and the like; as, for example, to the 'horsemen-travelers' in *Ruth*, or to the ideal retired 'captain of a small trading vessel,' described in an instructive note appended by Wordsworth in 1800

[1] For the preceding statements, see the references given above, pp. 109, 110; Carver's word for the whippoorwill, the *Muccawiss*, occurs in a passage from *The Excursion* quoted at the end of the present article.

[2] *Prelude* 3. 60 ff.

[3] Legouis, *The Early Life of Wordsworth*, p. 79, note.

to *The Thorn*.[1] His fondness for the literature of travel explains to our complete satisfaction the readiness with which he accepted Coleridge's suggestion for *The Blind Highland Boy*. Wordsworth, it will be remembered, at first set his blind hero afloat in an ordinary washing-tub. When Coleridge informed his brother-poet of the lad in Dampier's *New Voyage round the World* (1697) who went aboard his father's ship in a tortoise-shell, Wordsworth made the substitution without delay.[2]

We need not multiply instances. If space allowed, certain broader influences ought also to be discussed, in order to solve the question why Wordsworth, himself born with the instincts of an itinerant — *a pedlar*, he says, — with his favorite brother, John, a seaman, should call the first book of his longest poem 'The Wanderer,' and the whole poem *The Excursion*; or why, in characterizing his autobiography, that is, *The Prelude*, he should observe:

> A Traveler I am,
> Whose tale is only of himself.[3]

Books, he says, were Southey's passion; 'and wandering, I can with truth affirm, was mine; but this propensity in me was happily counteracted by inability from want of fortune to fulfil my wishes.'[4]

Let us come, however, to something more brief and tangible — a definite illustration of Wordsworth's indebtedness to a literary medium in his ideal representations

[1] Wordsworth, *Poetical Works* (Aldine Edition, ed. Dowden), 2. 306, 307.

[2] Cf. Coleridge, *Anima Poetae* (ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge, 1895), pp. 175, 176.

[3] *Prelude* 3. 195, 196.

[4] Wordsworth, *Poetical Works* (ed. Morley), p. 408.

of nature. According to a German dissertation by Dr. Oeftering,[1] since Wordsworth had never seen a pelican, all that he knew of this classic bird was the mediaeval fable that the female fed her young with her own heart's blood; like revolutionary France, she

> . . . turned an angry beak against the down
> Of her own breast.[2]

It looks as if Dr. Oeftering had not been studying Tutin's *Wordsworth Dictionary* any more assiduously than *The Prelude*. In Book Third, Wordsworth, with a censuring eye upon the Cambridge of his day and its uninspiring landscape, calls up in imaginative contrast his vision of what the surroundings of a seat of learning ought to be:

> Oh, what joy
> To see a sanctuary for our country's youth
> Informed with such a spirit as might be
> Its own protection; a primeval grove,
> Where, though the shades with cheerfulness were filled,
> Nor indigent of songs warbled from crowds
> In under-coverts, yet the countenance
> Of the whole place should bear a stamp of awe;
> A habitation sober and demure
> For ruminating creatures; a domain
> For quiet things to wander in; a haunt
> In which the heron should delight to feed
> By the shy rivers, and the pelican
> Upon the cypress spire in lonely thought
> Might sit and sun himself.[3]

This is not the least beautiful passage in *The Prelude*, nor the least curious. Aside from the present connection,

[1] W. Oeftering, *Wordsworth's und Byron's Natur-Dichtung*, Karlsruhe, 1901, p. 160.

[2] *Excursion* 8. 818, 819.

[3] *Prelude* 3. 427 ff.

it is of considerable interest as a document in pedagogy. The 'romantic' poet, influenced no doubt by the educational doctrines of Rousseau, is mentally transporting the youth of England, not merely to the land of social freedom, America, but to an aboriginal landscape and the home of the 'natural man,' the 'naked Indian.' The whole passage — ruminating creatures, pelican, cypress spire, and all — is a remarkable adaptation of a scene depicted by the Quaker botanist, William Bartram, on the banks of the Altamaha in Georgia: 'I ascended this beautiful river,' says Bartram, 'on whose fruitful banks the generous and true sons of liberty securely dwell, fifty miles above the white settlements. . . . My progress was rendered delightful by the sylvan elegance of the groves, cheerful meadows, and high distant forests, which in grand order presented themselves to view. The winding banks of the river, and the high projecting promontories, unfolded fresh scenes of grandeur and sublimity. The deep forests and distant hills re-echoed the cheering social lowings of domestic herds. The air was filled with the loud and shrill hooping of the wary sharp-sighted crane. Behold, on yon decayed, defoliated cypress tree, the solitary wood pelican, dejectedly perched upon its utmost elevated spire; he there, like an ancient venerable sage, sets himself up as a mark of derision, for the safety of his kindred tribes.'[1]

In the London *Athenaeum* for April 22, 1905,[2] having pointed out the parallel just noted, I tried to suggest

[1] *Travels through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida*, etc., London, 1794, pp. 47, 48.

[2] *Athenaeum*, 1905, 1. 498 ff.

reasons why Wordsworth, a scientific poet, should be drawn to the record of a poet-scientist and traveler like Bartram; I was, however, unable to do more than shadow forth the way in which the dominant imagination at work in *The Prelude* selected and appropriated its poetic material, from whatever source. It may be that the principle of selection is obvious enough simply on comparison of the two excerpts here brought together. The principle of appropriation must also pass without further comment than this: in the case before us — as has been said, a typical case, — what he learned from Bartram may have lain dormant in the poet's mind for something like five years, awaiting utilization.[1] It had become an assimilated experience, and was in the nature of a purified emotion 'recollected in tranquillity.' Wordsworth differentiates it in no way from such other 'living material' as he gathered through his personal observation of the external world about him; so much is certain.

By way of appendix, several less definite considerations and queries are herewith presented; some of them bearing more directly upon Wordsworth, or upon Wordsworth and Coleridge; some of them concerning rather the literary 'movement' in which Wordsworth has been recognized as a leader; all of them connected with the literature of travel. The present writer ventures to hope that one or two of them may stimulate a useful curiosity, and that his effort may eventually lead to a comprehensive study of the relation between geographical discovery during the

[1] Wordsworth became familiar with Bartram, so it seems, at Alfoxden. The passage in *The Prelude* was composed, so far as we know, at Grasmere in 1804.

latter part of the eighteenth century and that release of the imagination and renewal of poetic wonder which characterize the so-called 'return to nature' in the literature of 'romanticism.'

1. Wordsworth's imagination has sometimes been disparaged as relatively narrow and insular, though not by those who have known him well. As a poet he was restricted in his choice of subjects, and restrained in his treatment of such themes as he finally decided to employ. These limitations, however, were in his case matters of conscious will and artistic habit. He took but a part of the world for his stage. Yet his view of the world was free and large. Insular he was not. He came of an island race whose gaze has been fixed from earliest times upon a watery horizon, and he flourished during a period of utmost interest on the part of England in colonies beyond many seas. It is worthy of note that on April 7, 1770, when Wordsworth was born, James Cook, who was making his first voyage of discovery in the Pacific, was on his way from New Zealand to Australia. Furthermore, at the time when his poetical genius was most rapidly developing, Wordsworth was living, not in the Lake District of England, but within walking distance of a great shipping thoroughfare, the Bristol Channel, and not in 'solitude,' but in daily communion with an author whose best-known production is *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner.*

2. *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* is likewise the best-known poem of the collection called *Lyrical Ballads.* But that Wordsworth was in large measure responsible for the plot of this poem, or that he furnished considerably

more of its details than he afterwards remembered, cannot be set down as a matter of common knowledge. Its joint authorship, however, concerns us only in so far as the poem represents similar reading done by both its authors. Of the *Lyrical Ballads* as a whole we may say that attention has been too exclusively paid in the history of literature to the relation between these and other ballads, above all, the popular ballads exploited by Thomas Percy. When all is said, the fact remains that these 'experiments' of Coleridge and Wordsworth are not what are technically known as popular ballads; they are not naïve, but sophisticated and literary. As for their material, that is obviously not drawn from Percy and the rest so much as it is from eighteenth-century books of travel. And these latter are but one set of 'sources.'

Again, it has been remarked by more than one of our modern scholars that the revolt of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Bowles against the tradition of the age of Queen Anne was in many essentials a return to the standards of Spenser and Milton. Very true. In the Advertisement to *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), Wordsworth himself declares that '*The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere* was professedly written in imitation of the style, as well as of the spirit of the elder poets.' Here we are on familiar ground. But has it been anywhere remarked how essentially that revolt meant a recourse on the part of the new school, not merely to their own observation of nature, but to the observation of the best contemporary natural scientists?

3. It is, in fact, surprising to see with what unerring instinct Wordsworth and, to a lesser extent, Coleridge betook themselves to what we now can recognize as the

most trustworthy descriptions of natural phenomena by scientific and semi-scientific men of their day. We may regard it as a distinctive mark of great poets that, being themselves potential scientists, and having acquired the touchstone for truth to nature by supremely honest use of their own senses upon such phenomena as fall within the range of their own experience, they are able to test the validity of more technical observers, and, in appropriating information from the printed page, to separate safe from unsafe popular authorities. Accordingly, if Coleridge dealt too freely in questionable matters like the miracles treasured up by credulous geographers of the seventeenth century, and like Bryan Edwards' account of Obi witchcraft, the point remains that both he and Wordsworth quickly found their way to eighteenth-century treatises of permanent value like Edwards' *West Indies*, Bartram's *Travels*, Bruce's *Travels*, and Hearne's *Journey*.[1] After all, was this so strange? The enthusiastic scientist or the inquiring traveler keeps his eye 'fixed upon his object'; in describing, he speaks the language, not of Pope, but of a man in the presence of reality. The language of Shelvocke and James and Carver was 'language really used by men,' and by men often in a state of lively, yet normal, emotion. In *Expostulation and Reply* Wordsworth covertly ridicules 'modern books of moral philosophy.'[2] Setting these aside, we may imagine that the tastes of the two poets while they were writing *Lyrical Ballads* were mutually influential. Hence, and for other reasons, it is

[1] Cf. Coleridge, *Poetical Works* (ed. Campbell), p. 590; *Coleridge's Poems, Facsimile Reproduction*, p. 173; *Athenaeum*, January 27, 1894.

[2] See the Advertisement to the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads*,

not unlikely that the *Strange and Dangerous Voyage* of that very real man Captain Thomas James — poet and Arctic explorer — became familiar to both about the same time; though we have no positive proof that Wordsworth read James before the year 1819.[1]

4. But Wordsworth and Coleridge were not alone in this wide sea of reading. Bowles, who was to some extent responsible for the 'movement' — 'the return to nature' — which gained impetus through the publication of *Lyrical Ballads*, may after a fashion have shown the way in this direction also. For the student of that period Bowles is useful in that he takes care to indicate his sources. These, as his foot-notes show,[2] are principally the 'elder poets,' above all Milton and Shakespeare, and the travelers. Thus he proves himself conversant with Bartram, Bruce, Camoens, Chateaubriand, Craven, Forster, Molina, Park, De Quiros, Shaw, Southey, Stothard, and Zarco. One of his earlier poems, *Abba Thule*, harks back to Wilson's *Pelew Islands*. Among his later and longer attempts, *The Spirit of Discovery by Sea* catches our attention by its title. This and *The Missionary*, which is still later, bear ample testimony to his love of the wonders related by such as go down to the sea in ships. Whether Bowles may be thought to have stimulated his admirer Coleridge, and Coleridge's friend Wordsworth, in this interest, or whether they reacted rather upon him, or

[1] Cf. *Poems and Extracts chosen by William Wordsworth for an Album presented to Lady Mary Lowther, Christmas, 1819* (ed. Harold Littledale), London, 1905, pp. iv, 81; *Athenaeum*, 1906, 1. 325; Coleridge, *Poetical Works* (ed. Campbell), pp. 595, 596.

[2] I refer to later editions of Bowles; specifically to that by Gilfillan, Edinburgh, 1855, which is a reprint of the edition of 1837.

whether all three were carried on in a stream already strong, the truth is that such poetry of the eighteenth century as distinctly belongs with the poetry at the beginning of the nineteenth is, like the latter, permeated with the spirit of travel. We may follow this spirit from Cowper's 'Selkirk' to Keats' fine lines on Chapman's Homer, notwithstanding Keats' mistake of Cortez for Balboa. We may find it in a forgotten poet of sylvan nature like Thomas Gisborne.[1] Southey, who read everything, was both a traveler and an inveterate student of travels. So also was Byron.[2] If we look toward France at the turn of the century, so also was Chateaubriand. Nor could there be a better ethical criterion of his literary methods than his use of Bartram in *Atala*, compared with Wordsworth's conscientious treatment of the same material in *Ruth* and in *The Prelude*. The dubious filching from Bartram, Carver, and others in Chateaubriand's *Journal en Amérique* has been sharply censured in M. Bédier's *Études Critiques*.[3]

For anything dealing half so thoroughly with a comparable indebtedness, censurable or praiseworthy, among English authors, we have still to wait. Not that a consideration of the literature of travel in some connection with other literary problems during the last quarter of the eighteenth century has been wholly omitted. But it is a matter of regret that in her useful study, *The Treatment of Nature in English Poetry between Pope and Wordsworth*, Miss Reynolds should have regarded simply the

[1] Author of *Walks in a Forest*, 1794. Gisborne is not mentioned by Miss Reynolds in the dissertation referred to below.

[2] Cf. J. C. Collins, *Studies in Poetry and Criticism*, 1905, pp. 87 ff.

[3] Joseph Bédier, *Études Critiques*, Paris, 1903, pp. 127 ff.

eighteenth-century itineraries within Great Britain and Ireland, and neglected those without.[1] And it is unfortunate, furthermore, that even so far as these local itineraries are concerned, she should have noted merely the increasing sympathy with external nature which they in themselves disclose, and that she should not have aimed to measure the reaction between them and the later eighteenth-century poets. Yet in many cases it might be puzzling to disentangle any given poet's own direct impressions of the outer world from his debts to books of travel in England; whereas the problem becomes relatively distinct when it is a question of this or that poet's description of some landscape in America or China that he surely never beheld.

5. The interest that the poets of Wordsworth's generation took in foreign travels is paralleled notably by a similar interest on the part of those 'elder poets' whom they studied and tried to equal; it is in striking contrast to the relative lack of interest on the part of literary men during the intervening epoch of pseudo-classicism. The age of Elizabeth read geography, because, for one thing, there was new geography to read. The age of Anne did not, in the main because there was then a lull in geographical discovery.

In that efflorescence of intellect which followed the cloistered Middle Ages, and which we have been content to call the Renaissance, certain wholly new experiences were borne in upon the minds of Europeans; a certain amount of inspiring knowledge was, not revived through study of the classics — indeed, not awakened through any

[1] University of Chicago dissertation, 1896, chap. iv, pp. 192 ff.

sources previously accessible or familiar, — but acquired by the Old World for the first time since the dawn of Oriental civilization. This wholly fresh knowledge, these new experiences, these novel and vivid appeals from an enlarged external nature, came into Europe chiefly by way of the western sea. It would be idle to dilate here, or to refine, upon the influence of maritime discovery on the Renaissance; yet of that influence two aspects at least must be kept in view. First, whereas the Middle Ages learned geography in large measure from itinerants who had trod the land, the Renaissance had its imagination quickened rather by an access of knowledge from across the ocean. Now, since the days of Homer, the soul of man has been stimulated less urgently by overland communication than by marine. Secondly, if we carefully examine almost any typical author of the Renaissance, for example, Rabelais, we shall find his knowledge of geography about as exact as the state of the science then permitted.[1] This probably is true of Shakespeare; it undoubtedly is true of Milton.[2]

It may pass for a truism that the great development of geography as a body of information was a product of the Renaissance, although the discipline did not in general attain any very high degree of accuracy until after the middle of the eighteenth century. Though Humboldt was not born until 1769, nor Ritter until a decade later, yet after 1750, we may say, the study which they were to dominate had already begun to be a science in the modern sense of the term. In the meantime, and especially from

[1] Cf. Abel Lefranc, *Les Navigations de Pantagruel: Étude sur la Géographie Rabelaisienne.*

[2] Cf. *Modern Language Notes*, March, 1906, p. 86.

about 1700 on, there had been a distinct falling off, if not in the effort to order such facts as were known, at all events in the eagerness and rapidity with which new geographical data were acquired and made popular. It is to be emphasized that this epoch of comparative lethargy in observation corresponds to the period during which Alexander Pope was active and the pseudo-classic movement in literature was at its height.

After 1750 geography began to grope its way into the status of a modern science. The date of its clear emergence may be set for convenience' sake at 1770, when Cook was finishing his first voyage in the Pacific — the year of the birth of Wordsworth. Books of travel, which had been steadily growing more frequent, and on the whole more trustworthy, now came out in great numbers, the best of them appearing again in reissues and large collections. Their increase is easily illustrated. Pinkerton's lists, which are inclusive enough for the purpose, record, for example, but five titles of travels through Denmark and Norway published between 1700 and 1750. For the period 1750–1800 they record under the same head six times that number. Of these thirty, twenty-two appeared after 1770.[1] Moreover, as Miss Reynolds has noted, toward the end of the century the publication of foreign discoveries rapidly overbalanced that of itineraries dealing with England.

With these generalizations in hand, will it seem superfluous to insist that the relation between the discoveries and the wide-ranging imagination of the Renaissance is hardly more deserving of attention than is the relation

[1] Pinkerton, *Voyages and Travels* (1814) 17. 72–75.

between the modern, exact science of geography and that second renaissance of poetry which we trace in the age of Wordsworth? And will it seem inconsequent to suggest that a false limitation of the term 'nature' has done much to befog our understanding of him and other poets who are said to have returned to her? Might we not be at once more precise and more philosophical, if, with reference to this tendency in the 'romantic' mind, we employed some such expression as 'the return to geography,' using the word 'geography' in its most pregnant signification? This science, says an American dictionary, is the one that 'describes the surface of the earth, with its various peoples, animals, and natural products.'[1] Among the Germans it is something even more inclusive than that. I dare not now expand the definition; but was not Wordsworth in the truest sense a poetical geographer, a spiritual interpreter of observed phenomena on the earth? And what else shall we name his less restrained, yet noble successor, the author of 'Cloud Beauty' in *Modern Painters*?

6. Wordsworth's acquaintance with geography, or with one of its main branches, ethnology, enables us, in closing, to draw a useful line of demarcation between him and his great forerunner in the contemplation of nature, the prose-poet and self-taught scientist, Rousseau. Vestiges of Rousseau's doctrines may no doubt be discerned in Wordsworth's poetry to the end of his days. In his earlier verse, as M. Legouis makes clear, some of those doctrines were more prominent than Wordsworth, if he had been conscious of their origin, might have liked to

[1] *Standard Dictionary*, New York, 1913.

confess.[1] We have already noted a likeness to the educational theory of *Émile* in a passage taken from *The Prelude*.[2] But against one fundamental tenet of Rousseau, a tenet that was accepted in some guise or other by nearly every one with whom the young English poet came in contact, Wordsworth decisively reacted. The fallacy of the 'natural man' his study of travels in the new world immediately showed to be unsound. To assume that as we approach more closely to the state of aboriginal men we discover a more and more perfect type of humanity, was, he knew, to fly in the face of observed data. He was aware what aboriginal tribes were actually like. They were in even worse case than the hopeless dwellers in the immense complexity of London — that 'monstrous anthill on the plain.' They were by no means superlatively good and happy. Such a fallacy could, indeed, maintain a foothold only in the brain of a stubborn self-taught man like Jean Jacques, who neither knew anything about savages at first hand, nor systematically tested his preconceptions by appealing to authorities. Hence, if Wordsworth never perhaps came to see that immense cities are just as 'natural' as immense colonies of beavers, and just as normal as immense 'hosts of insects,' and that complexity of organization is a good or a bad thing, not in itself, but according to its fruits, still he ultimately made no mistake about the character of the 'natural man.' However, it may be that the violence of his disclaimer betrays an original leaning toward the error he describes.

[1] *The Early Life of Wordsworth*, pp. 54 ff.
[2] *Prelude* 3. 427 ff.

In *The Excursion*, near the close of Book Third, Wordsworth's 'Solitary,' summing up the results of his vain search for happiness in America, tells of his final hope and final disillusion, in part as follows:

> Let us, then, I said,
> Leave this unknit Republic to the scourge
> Of her own passions; and to regions haste,
> Whose shades have never felt the encroaching axe,
> Or soil endured a transfer in the mart
> Of dire rapacity. There, Man abides,
> Primeval Nature's child. A creature weak
> In combination, (wherefore else driven back
> So far, and of his old inheritance
> So easily deprived?) but, for that cause,
> More dignified, and stronger in himself;
> Whether to act, judge, suffer, or enjoy.
> True, the intelligence of social art
> Hath overpowered his forefathers, and soon
> Will sweep the remnant of his line away;
> But contemplations, worthier, nobler far
> Than her destructive energies, attend
> His independence, when along the side
> Of Mississippi, or that northern stream
> That spreads into successive seas, he walks;
> Pleased to perceive his own unshackled life,
> And his innate capacities of soul,
> There imaged: or when, having gained the top
> Of some commanding eminence, which yet
> Intruder ne'er beheld, he thence surveys
> Regions of wood and wide savannah, vast
> Expanse of unappropriated earth,
> With mind that sheds a light on what he sees;
> Free as the sun, and lonely as the sun,
> Pouring above his head its radiance down
> Upon a living and rejoicing world!
> So, westward, tow'rd the unviolated woods
> I bent my way; and, roaming far and wide,

Failed not to greet the merry Mocking-bird;
And, while the melancholy Muccawiss
(The sportive bird's companion in the grove)
Repeated o'er and o'er his plaintive cry,
I sympathized at leisure with the sound;
*But that pure archetype of human greatness,*
*I found him not.* There, in his stead, appeared
A creature, squalid, vengeful, and impure;
Remorseless, and submissive to no law
But superstitious fear, and abject sloth.
Enough is told![1]

The 'Solitary' is not Wordsworth; he is one of Wordsworth's dramatic conceptions; he speaks in extreme terms, and at last with bitterness. But his story reveals something of Wordsworth's education.[2]

## II. MINTO ON ROBERT BURNS

The old conception of the Ayrshire plowman-poet undoubtedly was that his poetry had no historical connection; that it stands apart as a unique phenomenon, entirely unconnected with the main stream of English poetry; that the peasant-poet owed everything to nature, and nothing to books; that he was a high-priest of poetry, without literary father or mother, raised up by nature herself *ab initio* amidst the most disadvantageous circumstances, as if to put to shame man's feeble calculations of means to ends in literary culture. This was the old conception, people finding it difficult to understand how a plowman could have trained himself to be

[1] *Excursion* 3. 913 ff.

[2] Lane Cooper, *A Glance at Wordsworth's Reading*, *Modern Language Notes* 22. 83–89, 110–117.

a great poet. I do not know how far this conception still prevails; but as something very like it is to be found in the famous essay on Burns by another great Scotchman of genius, Thomas Carlyle, and as it harmonizes with our natural desire to have an element of the miraculous in our saints and heroes, it has probably survived all the plain facts set forth by the poet's biographers. There is in the conception thus much obvious truth, that Burns owed little to school, and nothing to college; but when it is said that nature, and nature only, was his schoolmaster (unless the word is used in a sense sufficiently wide to include the works of man, and among them that work of man called literature), the theory does injustice to Burns as an artist, and is at variance with the plain facts of his life.

Supreme excellence in poetry is never attained by a sudden leap up from the level of common ideas and common speech, whether a man's everyday neighbors are rustics, or men and women of art and fashion and culture. The world in which his imagination moves is never entirely of his own creation. The great poet must have had pioneers from whom he derived some of the ideas and resources of his craft — enough, at least, to feed and stimulate and direct his own inborn energy. Burns, in truth, was a self-taught genius only in the sense in which all great artists are so; those who see in the Ayrshire plowman's mastery of the poetic art any rarer miracle than this are those only who attach an exaggerated importance to what schools and colleges can do in furthering the highest efforts of human genius. Beyond a certain point, as we all know, every man must

be his own schoolmaster; in this sense, nature was the schoolmaster of Burns. But, all the same, his poetry is not an isolated creation, entirely disconnected from the main body of literature. It has its own individuality, as the work of all great artists must have; but it had a literary origin, as much as the poetry of Chaucer or Shakespeare, or even Pope. When nature has done her work, and the unexpected has happened, it is generally easy to find something very natural in the means she has used to bring the unexpected to pass; and the very circumstances that seemed at first sight to be disadvantageous to Burns are now seen to have favored him in the fulfilment of his mission.

For a work of genius we require first of all a man of genius; but there are conditions that render the exercise of his genius possible, and there are influences that modify the character and the direction of his work. And, in the case of literary work, these conditions and influences are generally found in antecedent literature, though not necessarily in the literature of the language in which the artist works — literature having really an international unity. The course of literature is mainly self-contained; and, in reading its history, the impulse to great work in one generation may often be traced back to dimly-conceived aims and blind and imperfect performances in a previous generation. Nature begins her preparations for the advent of a great man long before he makes his appearance.

It is interesting, and it strengthens our sense of the unity of literature from generation to generation, to trace back in this way the movement that culminated in the

poetry of Burns to a very humble episode in the English poetry of Queen Anne's time — a passing fashion for writing what is called pastoral poetry, and a quarrel on the subject among the more celebrated wits of the day. The fashion had prevailed for some time before in France; in England the starting-point was Dryden's translation of Virgil's *Eclogues*. To this translation was prefixed an elegant discourse on pastoral poetry in general by William Walsh, Esq., a gentleman of wit and fashion, who wrote in a very neat and pointed style, subjected the views of the Frenchman, Fontenelle, to delicate and polite ridicule, and submitted to the public with great spirit and elegance his own views of what pastoral poetry ought to be. Mr. Walsh's ideal was of the most artificial kind, his poetical shepherds being men of a golden age, when grazing was the chief industry, and shepherds were, as he put it, men of learning and refinement; and his chief rules being that an air of piety should pervade the pastoral poem, that the characters should represent the ancient innocent and unpractised plainness of the golden age, and that the scenery should be truly pastoral — a beautiful landscape, and shepherds, with their flocks round them, piping under wide-spreading beech-trees. Pastoral poetry, as conceived by Mr. Walsh, who spoke the taste of his age, was a species of elegant trifling, something like the recent fancy for old French forms of verse (ballades, rondeaus, villanelles, and so forth), and nothing might have come of it; but it so happened that Mr. Walsh was the earliest literary friend and counselor of young Mr. Pope, who was persuaded to make his first essay as a poet in pastorals,

written in strict accordance with Walsh's principles; and of that came important consequences. Pope published in 1709, in a miscellany of Dodsley's; in the same volume appeared also pastorals from the pen of Ambrose Philips. Philips, known as 'Namby Pamby,' belonged to the coterie of Addison and Steele. Between that coterie and Pope arose jealousy and strife; hence, when four years later Pope produced his *Windsor Forest*, there appeared in the *Guardian*, the organ of the coterie (April, 1713, is the date), a series of articles on pastoral poetry, in which Steele incidentally gave a roll to the log of friend Namby Pamby, who was named as the equal of Theocritus and Virgil, and ridiculed, by implication, in a polite Queen-Anne manner, the pastoral poems of young Mr. Pope, without mentioning his name. This at least was the construction put upon the matter by Pope, who took a clever and amusing revenge of a kind to cause a great deal of talk about the *Guardian* articles. It was an amusing literary quarrel; but Steele's theory of pastoral poetry, thus occasionally produced, had more fruitful results. The numbers of the *Guardian* really set forth for the first time a fresh theory for that kind of composition, to the effect that in English pastoral poetry the characters should be not classical shepherds and shepherdesses — Corydon and Phyllis, Tityrus and Amaryllis — but real English rustics; that the scenery should be real English scenery; and that the manners and superstitions should be such as are to be found in English rural life.

Nothing was done to realize this theory in England till the time of Crabbe and Wordsworth (Gay merely

burlesqued it in his *Shepherd's Week*), but it so happened that it was taken seriously in Scotland. At the time when the *Guardian* articles appeared there was a social club in Edinburgh, named The Easy Club, which followed the literary movements of London with keen interest; and of this club Allan Ramsay was poet laureate. Allan also wrote pastoral elegies *à la mode*, neither better nor worse than the artificial stuff then in fashion; but in a happy hour he thought of trying his hand at the real pastoral, as conceived by Steele, and produced *The Gentle Shepherd*. Thus, out of a passing literary fashion and a literary quarrel came the original impulse to the composition of a work that must be numbered among the conditions that made the poetry of Burns possible. For no less honor than this can be claimed for Ramsay's pastoral comedy. Carlyle says somewhere that a man of genius is always impossible until he appears. This is quite true, but it is only a half-truth; and the other half is that a man of genius must always be possible before he appears. Favorable conditions for the exercise of his genius will not produce the man; but if the favorable conditions are not there when he appears, his genius will be stifled, and he will remain mute and inglorious.

Ramsay's *Gentle Shepherd* became, in the generation before Burns, one of the most popular books among the peasantry of Scotland, finding a place, it is said, beside the Bible in every plowman's cottage and shepherd's shieling; and it may be said to have created the atmosphere in which the genius of Burns thrived and grew to such proportions. It did this by idealizing rural life in Scotland, by giving the plowman a status in the world

of the imagination. It enabled him, as it were, to hold his head higher among his fellow-creatures, and opened his eyes to the elements of poetry in his hard, earth-stained, and weather-beaten existence. 'His rustic friend,' Carlyle says, in speaking of Burns and the boundless love that was in him, 'his nut-brown maiden, are no longer mean and homely, but a hero and a queen, to be ranked with the paragons of earth.' But it was Ramsay who first threw the golden light of poetry on the peasant lads and lasses of Scotland, and made heroes and heroines of Patie and Roger and Jenny and Peggy, and who thus created the atmosphere through which Burns saw them. No more striking proof of the power of literature to transform life can be given than the fact that half a century before the advent of Burns he was preceded by an ideal prototype in the *Gentle Shepherd*. Ramsay's description of his hero might pass for a description of the real Burns, only that nature asserted her supremacy by making the reality more astonishing than anything that the imagination of Ramsay, governed as it was by the genteel spirit of the time, had dared to put into verse.

Burns owed much to Allan Ramsay, and something also to another Scottish poet to whom he erected a memorial stone in Canongate churchyard, Edinburgh — the ill-fated Fergusson; but to say, with Carlyle, that he had 'for his only standard of beauty the rhymes of Ramsay and Fergusson,' is to miss altogether his true relation to the main body of English literature. His only standard of beauty! This is indeed to underrate the extent of the plowman's self-education. I need hardly remind you of

the studious habits of the Burns family, upon which all his biographers dwell; how their severe rule of bodily labor was combined with a rule of mental labor, no less strictly and strenuously observed because it was voluntary; how they carried books in their pockets to read whenever their hands were free from farm-work; how neighbors found them at their meals with spoon in one hand and book in the other. There is nothing, indeed, that impresses us more with a sense of the gigantic force of the personality of Burns, and the breadth of his manhood, than the thought that, with all the strength of his youthful passion for reading, tending, as it did, to detach him from his unlettered neighbors, it should not have converted him into a self-opinionated prig or a snarling pedant. What saved him from this fate was that he absorbed books, and was not absorbed by them; he was saved, probably, by that craving for distinction, of which he spoke more than once as his ruling passion, that thirst for admiring sympathy of living men and living women which made him appropriate and turn to his own uses what he found in books. That, probably, saved him from having 'loads of learned lumber in his head.' However this may be, the actual result was that Burns in those early years of intense and devouring study, ranging far beyond Ramsay and Fergusson, trained himself to be a great artist by mastering and rendering to harmonious practice the best critical ideas of his century.

The secret of Burns' enduring and still growing fame is, that he was the greatest poetic artist of his century; and I would submit the proposition that he was so, not

because he stood outside the main current of his century, and drew his inspiration solely from nature, meaning by nature untutored impulse, but because he took into his mind from books, and succeeded, by the force of his genius and the happy accident of his position, in reconciling two elementary principles of poetry that weaker intellects cannot keep from drifting into antagonism and mutual injury. One of these principles is that with which we are familiar in eighteenth-century literature, under the name of 'correctness,' which is only another name for perfection of expression, in so far as that can be attained by laborious self-criticism. When Pope began to write, he was advised by his friend Walsh, to whom I have already referred, to aim at correctness: the ancients had said everything, and there was nothing left for the modern poet but to improve upon their manner of saying it. In his *Essay on Criticism,* Pope embodied this idea in a couplet:

> True wit is nature to advantage dressed,
> What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed.

This is one principle; the other is that art must follow nature. It is a common opinion that the eighteenth-century poets were alive only to the first of these principles. But this will not bear examination; the sovereignty of nature was formally proclaimed by Pope, as well as the artistic doctrine of dressing her to advantage:

> First follow nature, and your judgment frame
> By her just standard, which is still the same;
> Unerring nature, still divinely bright,
> One clear, unchanged, and universal light,
> Life, force, and beauty, must to all impart,
> At once the source, and end, and test of art.

This was Pope's theory, and in the generation between Pope and Burns the importance of following nature, and the vanity of artificial rules, were insisted on with untiring enthusiasm by poets and critics alike. But till Burns arose, no poetic aspirant was found, with the doubtful exception of Collins, capable of reconciling the conflicting claims of nature and art in practice. Gray was stifled by too fastidious a desire for correctness; Thomson, Akenside, Shenstone, and the Wartons had abundant enthusiasm for nature, but insufficient art. It was not, indeed, their poetic principles that undid the correct school, it was rather the artificial taste, the fear of vulgarity, the liking for something elevated above the vulgar style, among the audience for which they wrote; and this led them into what was really a violation of Pope's principle of aiming at what oft was thought — induced them to search for what seldom was thought, and to avoid what was never expressed in polite society. Burns was more fortunate in his audience, although he worked on the same principles, and found both warrant and guidance in Pope's *Essay on Criticism*.

At first sight it might seem that Burns was all on the side of the naturalists:

> Gie me ae touch o' nature's fire,
> That's a' the learning I desire.

This aspiration is sometimes quoted as if it distinguished Burns from his artificial eighteenth-century predecessors, and as if it were the secret of his greatness; but really there is nothing singular in it: it might be paralleled from every poet and poetaster between Pope and himself.

We are all willing to throw upon nature the labor that nature requires from us. It was not the touch of nature's fire alone that made Burns the great artist he was; it was the happy combination of this with an indomitable effort after perfection of expression. That Burns had natural fire there is no question; everybody feels it in his poetry, and everybody allows that the touch of nature's fire is indispensable. But Burns had courage enough to recognize that the possession of natural fire did not absolve him from the necessity of resolute artistic discipline; and his distinction lies in this, that he had strength enough to undergo the discipline without losing his hold on nature. How many of his songs fulfil in substance Pope's ideal —

> What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed —

*Auld Lang Syne*, *Ye Banks and Braes*, *Scots wha hae*, *John Anderson*, *Tam Glen*, *Duncan Gray*. And if we either look at his poems in relation to the works of his predecessors, or study his recorded habits of composition, it is easy to see that it was not by trusting to natural impulse alone that he attained this perfection of expression. 'It is an excellent method in a poet,' he says in one of his letters, 'and what I believe every poet does, to place some favorite classic author, in his walks of study and composition, before him as a model.' This was obviously his own practice. For almost every one of his poems he had a precedent in general form as well as in metre: for *The Twa Dogs* and *Tam o' Shanter*, Allan Ramsay's fables, the *Twa Books* and *The Three Bonnets*; for *Hallowe'en*, Fergusson's *Hallow Fair*; for *The Cottar's Saturday Night*, Fergusson's *Farmer's Ingle*, and so on.

Even for his interchange of rhyming epistles with brother-bards, which were dashed, as he said, 'clean aff loof,' he had the precedent of Fergusson's correspondence with J. S. It would almost seem as if he never wrote except with some precedent in his eye, therein approving himself the genuine child of the critical principles and practice of Pope. Not, be it remembered, that he kept his precedent before him for servile imitation; it was before his mind rather as a stimulating rival, to be beaten on its own ground by superior natural force, higher art, or happier choice of theme. There is no better way of reviving our sense of the force of Burns' genius, if it should happen to get blunted by too prolonged familiarity, than putting his work alongside the precedent with which it competes. He did not waste his strength in searching for new types or strange topics; he tried to improve upon the old. 'I have no doubt,' he wrote to Dr. Moore (in 1789), 'but the knack, the aptitude, to learn the Muses' trade, is a gift bestowed by Him "who forms the secret bias of the soul"; but I as firmly believe that *excellence* in the profession is the fruit of industry, labor, attention, and pains.' And a description by himself of his habits at the age of sixteen gives us some idea of the kind of pains that he took, from a very early period, in his self-education to the office of poet: 'A collection of English songs was my vade-mecum. I pored over them driving my cart, or walking to labor, song by song, verse by verse; carefully noting the true, tender, or sublime, from affectation or fustian.' There we see the artist at work, laboriously building up for himself a standard of perfection in expression, and boldly applying nature as the test of art.

Ten years later, at the age of twenty-six, in the winter of 1785, stimulated by the intention of 'appearing in the public character of an author,' Burns poured forth poem after poem with marvelous rapidity; and seeing that much of his best work was produced then, his easy impetuous speed has been contrasted with the laborious care of his eighteenth-century predecessors, and it has been supposed that this speed was the secret of his success. But those who argue thus forget the long previous years of discipline to which the poet, with all his ardor of imagination, had had the strength of will to subject himself. In the same way we are apt to marvel at the ease and certainty of touch of a rapid painter, and forget the pains that it took him to acquire such mastery. There are few remains of Burns' apprentice work, because most of it was done in his head as he followed the plow or walked beside his cart, or strolled or lay in his scanty leisure on banks and braes.

But it is possible sometimes to trace a succession of tries with a favorite idea, till at last he found a perfectly satisfactory setting for it. The line,

> But seas between us braid hae roared,

is perfectly balanced in its place in *Auld Lang Syne* against the companion line:

> We twa hae paidl't in the burn.

But the ocean's roar had done duty in more than one of his earlier and less perfect poems before it was happily settled in its present connection. At that desperate crisis in his life when he proposed to expatriate himself, and

took a passage to the West Indies, he addressed the following lines to Jean Armour:

Though mountains rise and deserts howl,
And oceans roar between,
Yet dearer than my deathless soul
Still will I love my Jean.

We find the same idea in another poem of the same date:

Will ye go to the Indies, my Mary,
And leave auld Scotia's shore?
Will ye go to the Indies, my Mary,
Across the Atlantic's roar?

The idea occurs in still another poem, also written about the same time:

From thee, Eliza, I must go,
And from my native shore;
The cruel fates between us throw
A boundless ocean's roar;

But boundless oceans, roaring wide,
Between my love and me,
They never, never can divide
My heart and soul from thee.

I am afraid these quotations illustrate rather more than the poet's artistic practice; but they show at least that he was very constant as an artist, if not as a man.

Burns not only studied his art in books, and measured himself against established masters with resolute emulation and, we may well believe, a glorious joy in his own powers, but, living as he did in his youth from morning till night, day after day, in a world of the imagination, with books for his constant companions, he seems to have been influenced by books as few men have been

in his whole attitude toward life and his leading poetic themes. He carried into his daily intercourse with plain country-folk, who were his neighbors under the real sky, ideals derived from this artificial world; from it he drew his sustenance; it was the source of the strength that lay behind the outward man. Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson, in one of his *Familiar Studies of Men and Books*, draws an artistically harmonious and carefully finished picture of Burns as Rab the Ranter, imagining him as a rustic Don Juan or an Ayrshire Théophile Gautier. It is recorded that the farmer's son of Lochlea had, when a youth of twenty-one, the only tied hair in the parish of Tarbolton, and wore a plaid of a particular color, arranged in a particular manner round his shoulders. This little peculiarity Mr. Stevenson happily interprets as a sign of the poet's kinship in temperament with the self-reliant artist, who is not averse to public attention, but rather wishes to force his personality on the world. The comparison with Gautier is so far happy and suggestive that it puts proper emphasis on the artistic side of the poet's nature; it keeps us from forgetting that the Ayrshire plowman was, above everything, an artist, and, by force of artistic temperament and habit, not a little of a poser. Mr. Stevenson's diagnosis of the tied hair and the particular plaid, as artistic symptoms, is good, and one could wish, in his review of Burns' love affairs and love-letters, to have had more of the same happy vein of interpretation — to have had more of the artist brought into prominence and less of the professional Don Juan. But the truth is that any comparison of Burns to Don Juan or the magnificent leaders of the romantic movement in

France is anachronistic, and, so far, misleading. Though these had something in common with Burns, they were later developments, with marked modifications of race and circumstances; and if we go further back we shall find not merely parallels but prototypes, that had a direct influence in making Burns what he was. Rab the Ranter, the 'rantin' rovin'' boy that was born of the poet's imagination in Kyle, and was the 'worser spirit' of his conduct, was the lineal descendant of the roaring boys of the Elizabethan time and the swaggering wits and beaux of the days of King Charles II; but his nearest relations are to be found in the poetry and fiction that held the literary field when Burns was young. Rab the Ranter is first cousin to Tom Jones and Roderick Random and Charles Surface, and was probably acquainted with his relations; his own immediate parent was, as I have already indicated, the hero of Allan Ramsay's pastoral comedy, the 'Gentle Sheperd' Patie, a rattleskull,

> A very deil that aye maun hae his will,

a king among his fellows by virtue of a natural air of superiority, a rhymer and a singer, bold of address, glib of tongue, an adept in chaffing the lasses, irresistible in his arts of courtship, but, with all this, a student, 'reading fell books that teach him meikle skill,' familiar with Shakespeare and Ben Jonson, with poems, histories, and plays — 'reading,' as Ramsay says in his homely phrase,—

> Reading such books as raise a peasant's mind
> Above a lord's that is not so inclined.

All the roaring boys of eighteenth-century poetry and fiction are distinguished by a certain goodness of heart,

and an active scorn of meanness and hypocrisy; they have strong natural affections; they are full of compunction for the victims of their warm-blooded recklessness. In short, they are all believers in 'Rab's' ethical creed:

> The heart aye 's the part aye
> That makes us richt or wrang.

In so far as the poet was a rantin' rovin' Robin, this was his literary lineage and consanguinity. But the real Burns had a strain in him that would not permit him to be a light-hearted roaring boy. Rab the Ranter represented only one of his moods — a mood indulged rather in a spirit of defiance than with thorough enjoyment, as in one to the manner born. Burns was the son of the pious cottar whose Saturday night he celebrated, and he could not remain long at ease in the Zion of the ranters, however heartily he let himself go, and however splendid his powers of expression were when he was in the vein. He was the author of the addresses *To a Mouse* and *To a Mountain Daisy*, as well as of *Tam o' Shanter* and *The Jolly Beggars*; he was the 'Man of Feeling,' as well as 'Rab the Ranter.' One of his most marked qualities is that which Carlyle expresses with such eloquence of admiration, his large-hearted sensibility, his boundless love of mankind, his warm and ready sympathy for poor outcast defenceless creatures exposed to misfortune's bitter blast, a sympathy generous enough to embrace and make allowance for even the enemies of the well-conducted animal world — the prowling wolf and the devil himself. Herein, also, Burns was not singular; here, also, we find him the poet of

> What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed

in his time. When Burns wrote, sensibility or sentimentality — tenderness for the woes of the unfortunate, especially for sufferings that could not be relieved, or for which no relief was possible but a compassionate tear — was, and had been for several years, a ruling fashion in literature. Sensibility was a favorite virtue in the heroines, and even in the heroes, of the romances of the time. Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* and Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling* still stand out among the numerous contemporary writings in the same vein. 'Dear sensibility!' cries Sterne, 'source inexhausted of all that is precious in our joys or costly in our sorrows! . . . Thou givest a portion of it sometimes to the roughest peasant who traverses the bleakest mountains. He finds the lacerated lamb of another's flock. This moment I behold him, leaning with his head against his crook, with piteous inclination, looking down upon it! "Oh, had I come one moment sooner!"' Sterne and Mackenzie were favorite authors with Burns; he wore out two copies of *The Man of Feeling*, carrying it about in his pocket to read at odd times.

But the reader may ask: Am I not reducing Burns, the child of nature, the heaven-taught poet, to a mere creature of books? Would the lad that was born in Kyle not have been a 'rantin' rovin'' boy all the same if there had been no such character in literature to catch his imagination and sway his conduct? Would he not have been a 'man of feeling' if Sterne and Mackenzie had never written a line? Possibly; all that I suggest is that, apart from any question of what might have been, books did, as a matter of fact, influence both his character and his choice of poetical themes. The nature, of course, must have been

there before he could have been thus influenced, the natural affinity with what he absorbed from books, the germ that the 'potency of life' in them, to use Milton's phrase, quickened and expanded. That Burns would have felt pity for the poor mouse whose dwelling had been ruined by his fell plowshare, even if he had been absolutely illiterate, we can well believe; but that he would have written a poetic address to the mouse if he had not been steeped in the literature of sensibility is open to question. I merely afford an illustration of the truth expressed in Fletcher of Saltoun's famous saying: 'Let me make the ballads of a nation, and I care not who makes its laws.' Only Fletcher spoke of popular music-hall songs, and the remark admits of a much wider application — an application as wide as Milton gave it in his *Essay on the Liberty of Unlicensed Printing*: 'For books are not absolutely dead things, but doe contain a potencie of life in them to be as active as that soule was whose progeny they are; nay, they do preserve as in a violl the purest efficacie and extraction of that living intellect that bred them. . . . As good almost kill a man as kill a good book.'

I do not mean that Burns owed everything to books. In virtue of his artistic temperament, he was peculiarly susceptible to influences of all kinds — to ideas current in the minds of living men, as well as to ideas preserved in books; but books exercised a paramount influence upon him, because, as a poet or artist in words, he, more than the generality of men, lived and moved and had his being in the atmosphere of books. We have his own direct testimony to this, even if it was not to be divined from his artistic temperament, and the study of his works in relation to his contemporaries.

Take an example or two. We find him at a time when things were not going well with him writing as follows to his friend, Robert Ainslie: 'Let me quote you my two favorite passages, which, *though I have repeated them ten thousand times*, still they rouse my manhood and steel my resolution like inspiration:

> On Reason build resolve,
> That column of true majesty in man. — YOUNG

> Here, Alfred, hero of the State,
> Thy genius heavens high will declare;
> The triumph of the truly great
> Is never, never to despair!
> Is never to despair! — THOMSON, *Masque of Alfred*

For many men — most men, perhaps, — such high-sounding phrases are hollow and pointless, brass sounds and nothing more; for Burns they obviously had 'a potency of life.' A letter to Murdoch earlier in his career is still more significant of the support he received from books, turning poetry to the use that the late Mr. Matthew Arnold was never weary of recommending: 'My favorite authors are of the sentimental kind, such as Shenstone, particularly his *Elegies*; Thomson; *Man of Feeling*, a book I prize next to the Bible; *Man of the World*; Sterne, especially his *Sentimental Journey*; Macpherson's *Ossian*, etc. These are the *glorious models after which I endeavor to form my conduct*; and 't is incongruous, 't is absurd to suppose that the man whose mind glows with sentiments lighted up at their sacred flame — the man whose heart distends with benevolence to the whole human race, he "who can soar above this little scene of things" — can he descend to mind the paltry concerns about

which the terrae-filial race fret and fume and vex themselves! O how the glorious triumph swells my heart! I forget that I am a poor insignificant devil, unnoticed and unknown, stalking up and down fairs and markets, when I happen to be in them, reading a page or two of mankind, and "catching the manners living as they rise," whilst the men of business jostle me on every side as an idle incumbrance in their way.'

Through that frank letter we can look as through an open window into the heart of Burns, as it was at the age of twenty-four, and it helps us to understand why he failed as a farmer, and why he succeeded as a poet, because it shows us how resolutely his heart was set on one ambition, and how entirely his mind was occupied with the world of the imagination. At that date the ranter strain in Burns' character was but very partially developed; we can see that the 'man of feeling' was then uppermost; and we can note, also, the working in his mind of another favorite ideal of the time — a favorite ideal among artists at all times — that of the *spectator*, the *observer*, who comes down from his world of dreams and meditations to read in the great book of mankind.

Anything that I have said would lead very far from my meaning if it conveyed the impression that Burns neglected to study either man or nature from the life. My theory, if anything so obvious can be dignified with the name of theory, only is that it was from literature that his genius received the original impulse and bent to that study by which literature was so much enriched. His poetry is not a mere freak of nature, a thing *sui generis*, but an organic part of the body of English literature, with

its attachments or points of connection only slightly disguised by difference of dialect. It drew its inspiration from literature, and it became in its turn a fruitful source of inspiration to two great poets of the next generation, Wordsworth and Byron. One main secret of Byron's fascination was the frank sincerity with which he laid bare his own personal feelings to the world, abandoning the timid reserve, the polite reticence about self, that had been the ruling tradition of the eighteenth century; and it may be doubted whether, with all his impetuous strength and defiant pride, Byron would have broken so completely with this tradition if Burns had not led the way. It is with the 'nobly pensive' side of Burns, with Burns as the 'man of feeling,' that Wordsworth connects himself; and it may be doubted whether Wordsworth would have reached the conviction which is the root and source of so much of his best work — that

> Nature for all conditions wants not power
> To consecrate, if we have eyes to see
> The outside of her creatures, and to breathe
> Grandeur upon the very humblest face
> Of human life —

it may be doubted whether Wordsworth would have reached this conviction as an inspiring principle of fresh poetic work if Burns had not first taught him — to use his own words in acknowledging the obligation —

> How verse may build a princely throne
> On humble truth.

Carlyle, in his celebrated essay on Burns, in which, with all its eloquence, he seems to me to speak far too

disparagingly of Burns' actual achievement as a poet, regrets that his father's circumstances did not permit him to reach the university, and conjectures that he might then have 'come forth, not as a rustic wonder, but as a regular, well-trained intellectual workman, and changed the whole course of English literature.' But after all, as it was, Burns did something like this. I do not myself believe in the possibility of revolutionary changes in literature; the history of literature is the history of a gradual development, advancing often, no doubt, by leaps and bounds, but always by natural transition from one stage to another. I doubt, therefore, whether Burns would have 'changed the whole course of English literature' if he had gone to a university; but, as it was, he exercised an important influence on that literature, and it is at least probable that he would rather have been hindered with than helped in that mission if his education had been different from what it was. He might have been a happier man otherwise, but it may be doubted whether he would have been a greater poet.[1]

[1] William Minto, *The Historical Relationships of Burns. Literature of the Georgian Era*, pp. 295–311. By permission of William Blackwood and Sons, and of Harper and Brothers.

## III. BYRON'S EARLY READING

[Byron was born January 22, 1788; the list was made November 30, 1807. As Ruskin says: 'Byron's early power was founded on a course of general reading of the masters in every walk of literature, such as is, I think, utterly unparalleled in any other young life, whether of student or author.'[1]]

### LIST OF HISTORICAL WRITERS WHOSE WORKS I HAVE PERUSED IN DIFFERENT LANGUAGES

*History of England.* — Hume, Rapin, Henry, Smollet,[2] Tindal, Belsham, Bisset, Adolphus, Holinshed, Froissart's Chronicles (belonging properly to France).

*Scotland.* — Buchanan, Hector Boethius, both in the Latin.

*Ireland.* — Gordon.

*Rome.* — Hooke, Decline and Fall by Gibbon, Ancient History by Rollin (including an account of the Carthaginians, etc.), besides Livy, Tacitus, Eutropius, Cornelius Nepos, Julius Caesar, Arrian, Sallust.

*Greece.* — Mitford's Greece, Leland's Philip, Plutarch, Potter's Antiquities, Xenophon, Thucydides, Herodotus.

*France.* — Mezeray, Voltaire.

*Spain.* — I chiefly derived my knowledge of old Spanish History from a book called the Atlas, now obsolete. The modern history, from the intrigues of Alberoni down to the Prince of Peace, I learned from its connection with European politics.

*Portugal.* — From Vertot; as also his account of the Siege of Rhodes — though the last is his own invention,

[1] *Praeterita* 1. 8.

[2] Byron's spelling, etc. (or are they Moore's?) have been retained.

the real facts being totally different. — So much for his Knights of Malta.

*Turkey.* — I have read Knolles, Sir Paul Rycaut, and Prince Cantemir, besides a more modern history, anonymous. Of the Ottoman History I know every event, from Tangralopi, and afterwards Othman I, to the peace of Passarowitz, in 1718, — the battle of Cutzka, in 1739, and the treaty between Russia and Turkey in 1790.

*Russia.* — Tooke's Life of Catherine II, Voltaire's Czar Peter.

*Sweden.* — Voltaire's Charles XII, also Norberg's Charles XI — in my opinion the best of the two. — A translation of Schiller's Thirty Years' War, which contains the exploits of Gustavus Adolphus, besides Harte's Life of the same Prince. I have somewhere, too, read an account of Gustavus Vasa, the deliverer of Sweden, but do not remember the author's name.

*Prussia.* — I have seen, at least, twenty Lives of Frederick II, the only prince worth recording in Prussian annals. Gillies, his own Works, and Thiebault — none very amusing. The last is paltry, but circumstantial.

*Denmark.* — I know little of. Of Norway I understand the natural history, but not the chronological.

*Germany.* — I have read long histories of the house of Suabia, Wenceslaus, and, at length, Rodolph of Hapsburgh and his *thick-lipped* Austrian descendants.

*Switzerland.* — Ah! William Tell, and the battle of Morgarten, where Burgundy was slain.

*Italy.* — Davila, Guicciardini, the Guelphs and Ghibellines, the battle of Pavia, Massaniello, the revolutions of Naples, etc., etc.

*Hindostan.* — Orme and Cambridge.
*America.* — Robertson, Andrews' American War.
*Africa.* — Merely from travels, as Mungo Park, Bruce.

BIOGRAPHY

Robertson's Charles V. — Caesar, Sallust (Catiline and Jugurtha), Lives of Marlborough and Eugene, Tekeli, Bonnard, Buonaparte, all the British Poets, both by Johnson and Anderson, Rousseau's Confessions, Life of Cromwell, British Plutarch, British Nepos, Campbell's Lives of the Admirals, Charles XII, Czar Peter, Catherine II, Henry Lord Kaimes, Marmontel, Teignmouth's Sir William Jones, Life of Newton, Belisaire, with thousands not to be detailed.

LAW

Blackstone, Montesquieu.

PHILOSOPHY

Paley, Locke, Bacon, Hume, Berkeley, Drummond, Beattie, and Bolingbroke. Hobbes I detest.

GEOGRAPHY

Strabo, Cellarius, Adams, Pinkerton, and Guthrie.

POETRY

All the British Classics as before detailed, with most of the living poets, Scott, Southey, etc.— Some French in the original, of which the Cid is my favorite. — Little Italian. — Greek and Latin without number; — these last I shall give up in future. — I have translated a good deal from both languages, verse as well as prose.

ELOQUENCE

Demosthenes, Cicero, Quintilian, Sheridan, Austin's Chironomia, and Parliamentary Debates from the Revolution to the year 1742.

DIVINITY

Blair, Porteus, Tillotson, Hooker — all very tiresome. I abhor books of religion, though I reverence and love my God, without the blasphemous notions of sectaries, or belief in their absurd and damnable heresies, mysteries, and Thirty-nine Articles.

MISCELLANIES

Spectator, Rambler, World, etc., etc. — Novels by the thousand.

All the books here enumerated I have taken down from memory. I recollect reading them, and can quote passages from any mentioned. I have, of course, omitted several in my catalogue; but the greater part of the above I perused before the age of fifteen.[1]

## IV. SPENSER'S USE OF BOOKS

From the essay on Ireland we discover how Spenser went about the writing of prose, and while perhaps such information scarcely reveals his methods of preparation for poetical writing, it is safe to assume that he did not take less pains for his chosen type of literature than for this type which was of secondary importance to him. It was only after careful preliminary work and planning, and

[1] Moore, *The Works of Lord Byron, with his Letters and Journals, and his Life* (London, 1832) 1. 140–144.

the addition to his own reading of all that he was able to learn from the Irish bards and chroniclers, that he ventured to set down anything. 'Out of them both togither, with comparison of times, likewise of manners and customes, affinitye of woordes and names, propertyes of natures and uses, resemblances of rytes and ceremonyes, monumentes of churches and tombes, and many other like circumstaunces,' he gathered what he called 'a likilihood of trueth.' If all this labor preceded the production of the Irish treatise, is it probable that the Ladie Muses, or any other providers of celestial fury, were allowed to stand as sole sponsors for the *Faerie Queene*? It may be said that the prose was in the class of an exact report upon political conditions important in Spenser's day and to his sovereign, and that hence he was scrupulous to prepare himself. But it may be answered that the *Faerie Queene* was the man's life-work, a work for which he prophesied immortality, and for whose perfection no labor of brain or hand could have seemed too detailed or too onerous. In addition to this reasoning from his evident practice on one occasion to his probable method on all occasions, there is one more proof to be adduced. In one of Spenser's letters to Gabriel Harvey, he speaks of his lost, or subsequently recast, poem, *Epithalamion Thamesis*, and convinces us of the care that he took to inform himself concerning a subject before he wrote about it. In this particular case he had undertaken to describe all 'the rivers throughout Englande . . . and their righte names and right passage.' It was, he said, a work of much labor, but a work in which he found assistance, because Master Holinshed had made a study of

these streams and had 'bestowed singular paines in searching oute their firste heades and sources, and also in tracing and dogging oute all their course, til they fall into the sea.' 'Poetry,' said Wordsworth, 'is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; it is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all Science'; and as Wordsworth turned for his material to literature, to books of travel and natural science, to the best that contemporary knowledge offered him, so from this instance of the rivers we may be sure that Spenser turned with the poet's characteristic curiosity and appreciation to whatsoever sources of information he found available.

Before we leave the general subject of the poet's method, let us revert to the Irish essay long enough to glance at the writers either consulted by Spenser in its preparation, or referred to by him in its course. In order to discuss the Irish mantle, Spenser has collected information from such various sources as the Bible, Diodorus Siculus, Herodotus, 'the Greeke Commentaryes upon Calimachus,' and Virgil. Concerning their arms and battle array, he has read Olaus Magnus, Buchanan's *Rerum Scoticarum Historia*, Solinus 'and others,' and Herodianus 'and others.' He refers from memory to a passage in Plutarch's *Treatise of Homer*, and to Lucian's 'Sweete dialogue which is intituled Toxaris or of frendship.' He has made a thorough study of Irish customs and superstitious rites, and here again consulted Buchanan. He speaks of Camden's explanation of an old Scythian legend, and at the close of his argument, meant to prove the Scythian descent of the Irish, he writes: 'Many such customes I could recount

unto you, as of theyr old manner of marrying, of burying, of dauncing, of singing, of feasting, of cursing.' It reminds one again of Scaliger's poet, who is the creator of a second nature, and more particularly of Scaliger's paragon, Virgil, who, we are told, talks of the building and managing of ships, of wars and cities and laws, and is conversant with all the arts and all the sciences; indeed, the poet is primarily the man of understanding in its scientific, historic, philosophic, almost in its divine, sense. But, to continue, Spenser has also read the ancient records of Bede; he has made an etymological investigation of British words in use among the Irish; and he has taken note of all that Strabo had written concerning the adoption by the Spaniards of the letters brought them by the Phoenicians, and of all that 'many auncient and authentycal writers' had said of the subsequent carrying of those letters by Spanish Gauls into Ireland. Before the essay is done, this Elizabethan poet has mentioned specifically something like twenty-five sources of information, besides histories and chronicles whose authorship is not specified; he has more than once asserted that his discussion is not full, and that much remains to be said; he has indirectly given a warning against unquestioning acceptance of the statements of the Irish bards; and he has administered a rebuke to Stanihurst, who, though a man of learning, and of Irish birth, has been lightly 'carryed away with old wives tales from approovaunce of his own reason,' and who, failing to search into the truth, is led to ground gross imaginations upon gross conjectures. Spenser's careful investigation of Irish ways and traditions convinces

him of their value as literary data, and their right to conscientious treatment.

'Indeede, Eudoxus,' he writes, 'you say very true; for alle the customes of the Irish, which I have often noted and compared with that I have reade, would minister occasion of most ample discourse of the first originall of them, and the antiquityes of that people, which in trueth I doe thinke to be more auncient then most that I knowe in this end of the world; soe as, yf it were in the handling of some man of sound judgement and plentifull reading, it would be most pleasaunt and proffitable.'[1]

And Eudoxus is in agreement, for he declares with enthusiasm: 'This ripping up of auncient historyes is very pleasing unto me, and indeede savoureth of good conceite, and some reading withall.'[2]

All this painstaking preparation resulted, to be sure, in a prose tract, but it is the same sort of painstaking preparation that goes to equip the poet, and is as likely to furnish material for an epic or a drama as for a political or economic treatise.

It is not so easy to trace Spenser's studies and examination of sources, and his conscious and acknowledged debts to literature, in his poems; however, we can gather up a few references of interest. He writes to Sir Walter Raleigh that he followed 'all the antique poets historicall' in the compilation of the *Faerie Queene* — they turn out to be Homer and Virgil; to them he adds Ariosto and Tasso — 'by ensample of whiche excellente poets,' who fashioned virtuous men, he labors to portray his hero, 'perfected in the twelve private morall vertues, as

[1] *Ireland*, p. 624. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 629.

Aristotle hath devised.' Many times, now directly by name, now under the title 'Tityrus,' he makes grateful and admiring references to Chaucer, that 'well of English undefyled,' in the footing of whose feet he strives to follow. Langland, too, whom he mentions in the epilogue to the *Shepheardes Calender*, must have been much in his thought. Finally, we know from the allusions in his minor works to contemporary poets that he regarded their verse with interest, and, quite simply and modestly, thought of himself as one of them, though later ages have so unhesitatingly set him higher.

Though this study cannot consider Spenser's unacknowledged sources, some of the most obvious of them may be set down. Aristotle, as indicated above, suggests the very framework of the *Faerie Queene*, throughout which, and in the *Shepheardes Calender*, we trace Virgil, Theocritus, Bion, and Lucretius, possibly Homer; Plato inspires the *Hymns*, while the *Visions* reveal a copious debt to Petrarch and Tasso, and to the French sonneteers. . . . Italian and French influences were strong upon Spenser. So incomplete an enumeration of sources is of little value *per se*; it is here included only with the hope that it may militate against the all too common tendency to underestimate the part that books play in the inspiration and equipment of great poets. The ill-informed, the thoughtless, and those whose enthusiasm springs from the admiration of things not necessarily or intrinsically admirable, delight too much to say of certain poets: 'They owed nothing to books, they drew their material at first hand from nature, or from the play of their own imagination.' . . . But because Wordsworth had the good fortune

to write much in the open air, and because Burns composed and perfected his verse as he strode behind the plow, and because Spenser was possessed of an opulent fancy, and wandered brooding and dreaming in 'the lond of faerie,' let no one suppose that these men had not studious habits, and did not eagerly and earnestly make acquaintance with literature.[1]

## V. SHAKESPEARE'S BOOKS

It is exceedingly improbable that Shakespeare was the owner of a private library of large dimensions. In the absence of public libraries in those days, it becomes natural to ask where the poet found the volumes he required. It has been suggested that the libraries of his patron the Earl of Southampton, Jonson, Camden, and others were thrown open to him. This is possible, though he was not dependent on their generosity. In Shakespeare's day each bookseller's shop was a sort of public library. Of these shops there was no lack in London, especially round about St. Paul's. . . .

I look upon Shakespeare as the great architect, who, gifted with a truly divine talent, gave the materials their beautiful shape. The architect can never be made by the things; but he does not make the things, either. The materials are given, not created by him; in so far, he is dependent on them. But more than this, his very conceptions and designs, however original they may be, are influenced by previously conceived plans and existent

[1] Ida Langdon, *Materials for a Study of Spenser's Theory of Fine Art*, 1911, pp. xxviii–xxxiv.

structures. In brief, originality is not creative production, but novel combination.

All this applies to Shakespeare. However great a genius he was, he was dependent on his 'materials.' He would never have become what he was, had he lived, say, in China from 1564 to 1616, or in England in the times of Hengist and Horsa. As a child of the western world, he imbibes with his mother's milk certain ideas and modes of thought; as a child born in England in 1564, he is the inheritor of a language ready made, of all the literature of centuries, and of the culture and art of the Island. A heaven-born artist though he was, he had to learn much from his predecessors, many of them geniuses and men of the first rank. Their lessons he did not despise. He studied their writings carefully and diligently, until he became a truly well-read man. . . .

'People,' said Goethe, 'are always talking about originality; but what does that mean? As soon as we are born the world begins to act on us, and this goes on to the end. And, after all, what can we call our own except energy, strength, and will? If I could give an account of all that I owe to great predecessors and contemporaries, there would be but a small balance in my favor. . . .

'In point of fact, we are all collective beings, do what we may; for how little have we, and are we, that we can strictly call our own property? We must all receive and learn both from those who were before us and from those who are with us. Even the greatest genius would not go far if he willed to draw everything out of his own internal self. But many very simple-minded men do not comprehend that; and they grope in darkness for half

a life, with their dreams of originality. I have known artists who boasted of having followed no master, but of being indebted to their own genius for everything. Fools! as if that were possible at all; and as if the world did not force itself upon them at every step, and make something of them in spite of their own stupidity. . . . I may speak of myself, and may modestly say what I feel. It is true that, in my long life, I have done and achieved many things of which I might certainly boast. But to speak the honest truth, what had I that was properly my own, save the ability to see and hear, to distinguish and to select, and to enliven with some wit what I had seen and heard, and to reproduce it with some degree of skill? I by no means owe my works to my own wisdom alone, but to a thousand things and persons around me that provided me with material. There were fools and sages, minds enlightened and narrow, childhood, youth, and mature age — all told me what they felt, what they thought, how they lived and worked, and what experiences they had gained; and I had nothing further to do than to put out my hand and reap what others had sown for me.' . . .

Many of what are called Shakespeare's sources contain the mere embryos of his works. How despicable, for example, is *The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth* in comparison with Shakespeare's *Henry the Fourth* and *Henry the Fifth*! None the less it is a production of perennial interest now, as showing the wonderful transformation which the subject received under the great master's hands. In other cases Shakespeare follows his source very closely. Nothing can be more interesting and instructive

than an hour spent in Shakespeare's studio, where we can watch him actually at work upon his materials. We get into closer touch with him, and we arrive at a better understanding. . . .

What were Shakespeare's chief sources? The answer to this question, which I have been frequently asked, is: English dramatic works, and the English literature generally, inclusive of the popular literary productions, Holinshed in special; Plutarch; the Bible; and Ovid. . . .

The question regarding the poet's education and learning has proved of remarkable attraction from the first. The learned Ben Jonson, in his commendatory verses prefixed to the First Folio, 1623, said:

> And though thou hadst small Latin, and less Greek,

—a verdict which is not devoid of a smack of superciliousness. That Shakespeare was no match for Ben Jonson, as far as knowledge of the ancient classics is concerned, goes without saying. But that he had no need to be ashamed of his classical attainments we shall soon see. For generations, however, it became a standing phrase that Shakespeare lacked learning and art. . . .

Whatever the young genius with the best brains in England did in his hours of freedom, he certainly spent a great part of the day in the schoolroom. He received some mental training there. Of what nature was it, and what did he learn there? What were his school-books?

Young Will Shakespeare probably entered the Grammar School of Stratford in 1570 or 1571, at the age of six or seven years. In 1571 Shakespeare's father was chief alderman of the town. . . . The boy was therefore

of a very respectable Stratford family. There is some reason to suppose that he left school about 1578. The attendance was free of charge.

The boy first had to learn reading by aid of the horn-book, which consisted of a slab of wood, or other substance, in size usually rather less than 5 × 3 inches, with a handle at one end. A printed sheet, containing the criss-cross, the alphabet, the vowels, some elements of spelling like *ab*, *ba*, etc., and the Lord's Prayer, was glued down to the wood, and covered by a thin plate of transparent horn. . . . The horn-books of about 1570 were no doubt all in black letter.

A first reading-book given to the young was the 'ABC-book,' which contained reading exercises and religious matters, with the catechism. The two other R's had to be learnt, too, of course. Copy-books had been already introduced, to judge from *Love's Labor's Lost* 5. 2. 42: 'Fair as a text B in a copy-book.' Counters, that is to say, round pieces of metal, were characteristic aids of earlier days in arithmetical operations. Shakespeare alludes to them in several passages, notably in *Winter's Tale* 4. 2. 33 ff., where the Clown confesses: 'I cannot do 't without counters.'

As soon as the boy had mastered the first rudiments, which were apparently taught by a pupil-teacher, or *abecedarius*, he was ready for the higher curriculum of the grammar school. What the curriculum of a school in a smaller town would consist of has been carefully studied by the late Professor Thomas Spencer Baynes, whose guidance we are safe in following. I shall quote his own words, inserting within square brackets a few

remarks which are in full harmony with other passages in Baynes' paper, and with Lupton and Furnivall's list: . . . 'In his first year . . . Shakespeare would be occupied with the Accidence and Grammar [namely, Lily's *Grammar*]. In his second year, with the elements of grammar, he would read some manual of short phrases and familiar dialogues, and these, committed to memory, would be colloquially employed in the work of the school [some manual like *Sententiae Pueriles*, *Pueriles Confabulatiunculae*, *Corderius' Colloquies*]; in his third year, if not before, he would take up Cato's *Maxims* and Aesop's *Fables*; in his fourth, while continuing the *Fables*, he would read the *Eclogues* of Mantuanus, parts of Ovid, some of Cicero's *Epistles*, and probably one of his shorter treatises; in his fifth year he would continue the reading of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, with parts of Virgil and Terence; and in the sixth, Horace, Plautus, and probably part of Juvenal and Persius, with some of Cicero's *Orations* and Seneca's *Tragedies*. In going through such a course, unless the teaching at Stratford was exceptionally inefficient, the boy must have made some progress in several of these authors, and acquired sufficient knowledge of the language to read fairly well at sight the more popular poets and prose writers such as Ovid and Cicero. [The Greek grammar, if any, in use at Stratford would most likely be Clenard's *Institutiones Absolutissimae in Graecam Linguam*.] The masters of the school during the time Shakespeare attended it would seem, however, to have been at least of average attainments and ability, as they rapidly gained promotion. . . .'[1]

[1] H. R. D. Anders, *Shakespeare's Books*, pp. xvi, xvii, xviii, xx, 6, 8, 9–11.

## VI. AN ILLUSTRATION OF SHAKESPEARE'S USE OF BOOKS

It will readily be granted that on the part of a student, as distinguished from the naïve and unformed reader, no greater mistake can be made than to fancy some thought or expression in an English author to be original with him, and a sure mark of his particular genius, when in point of fact it is not original with him, but comes, let us say, through a series of intermediate translations, from the Greek of Plutarch. There is a well-known description in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* of the Egyptian Queen as she first appeared to the hero:

> When she first met Mark Antony, she pursed up his heart,
> upon the river of Cydnus . . .
> The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne,
> Burned on the water; the poop was beaten gold,
> Purple the sails; and so perfumed, that
> The winds were love-sick with them; the oars were silver,
> Which to the tune of flutes kept stroke, and made
> The water which they beat to follow faster,
> As amorous of their strokes. For her own person,
> It beggared all description; she did lie
> In her pavilion — cloth-of-gold of tissue —
> O'er-picturing that Venus where we see
> The fancy outwork nature; on each side her
> Stood pretty-dimpled boys, like smiling Cupids,
> With divers-colored fans, whose wind did seem
> To glow the delicate cheeks which they did cool,
> And what they undid did.[1]

Is the description original? One measure of its originality is furnished by the passage in North's Plutarch which Shakespeare happens to be adapting:[2]

[1] *Antony and Cleopatra* 2. 2. 191 ff.

[2] Carr, *Four Lives from North's Plutarch*, pp. 185, 186.

'When she was sent unto by divers letters . . . she . . . mocked Antonius so much that she disdained to set forward otherwise, but to take her barge in the river of Cydnus, the poop whereof was of gold, the sails of purple, and the oars of silver, which kept stroke in rowing after the sound of the music of flutes, howboys, citherns, viols, and such other instruments as they played upon in the barge. And now for the person of herself: she was laid under a pavilion of cloth-of-gold of tissue, apparelled and attired like the goddess Venus commonly drawn in picture; and hard by her, on either hand of her, pretty fair boys apparelled as painters do set forth god Cupid, with little fans in their hands, with the which they fanned wind upon her.'[1]

## VII. MILTON'S PLANS AND STUDIES FOR *PARADISE LOST*

It was in 1639, after his return from his Italian tour, in his thirty-first year, that Milton, as he tells us, first bethought himself seriously of some great literary work, on a scale commensurate with his powers, and which posterity should not willingly let die. He had resolved that it should be an English poem; he had resolved that it should be an epic; nay, he had all but resolved — as is proved by his Latin poem to Manso, and his *Epitaphium Damonis* — that his subject should be taken from the legendary history of Britain, and should include the romance of Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table.

[1] Lane Cooper, *Ancient and Modern Letters*, in the *South Atlantic Quarterly*, II. 237, 238.

Suddenly, however, this decision was shaken. He became uncertain whether the dramatic form might not be fitter for his purpose than the epic, and, letting go the subject of Arthur, he began to look about for other subjects. The proof exists in the form of a list — written by Milton's own hand in 1640–1641, or certainly not later than 1642, and preserved among the Milton manuscripts in Trinity College, Cambridge — of about one hundred subjects, many of them Scriptural, and the rest from British history, which he had jotted down, with the intention, apparently, of estimating their relative degrees of capability, and at last fixing on the one, or the one or two, that should appear best. Now at the head of this long list of subjects is *Paradise Lost.* There are no fewer than four separate drafts of this subject as then meditated by Milton for dramatic treatment. The first draft consists merely of a list of *dramatis personae*, as follows:

'*The Persons:* Michael; Heavenly Love; Chorus of Angels; Lucifer; Adam, Eve, with the Serpent; Conscience; Death; Labor, Sickness, Discontent, Ignorance, with others, Mutes; Faith; Hope; Charity.'

This draft having been canceled, another is written parallel with it, as follows:

'*The Persons:* Moses [originally written 'Michael or Moses,' but the words 'Michael or' deleted, so as to leave 'Moses' as preferable for the drama]; Justice, Mercy, Wisdom; Heavenly Love; the Evening Star, Hesperus; Lucifer; Adam; Eve; Conscience; Labor, Sickness, Discontent, Ignorance, Fear, Death, [as] Mutes; Faith; Hope; Charity.'

This having also been scored out, there follows a third draft, more complete, thus:

'*Paradise Lost: The Persons:* Moses προλογίζει, recounting how he assumed his true body; that it corrupts not, because of his [being] with God in the mount; declares the like of Enoch and Eliah, besides the purity of the place — that certain pure winds, dews, and clouds preserve it from corruption; whence exhorts to the sight of God; tells them they cannot see Adam in the state of innocence by reason of their sin. — [Act I]: Justice, Mercy, Wisdom, debating what should become of Man if he fall. Chorus of Angels sing a hymn of the Creation. — Act II: Heavenly Love; Evening Star. Chorus sing the marriage song and describe Paradise. — Act III: Lucifer contriving Adam's ruin. Chorus fears for Adam and relates Lucifer's rebellion and fall. — Act IV: Adam, Eve, fallen; Conscience cites them to God's examination. Chorus bewails and tells the good Adam hath lost. — Act V: Adam and Eve driven out of Paradise, presented by an Angel with Labor, Grief, Hatred, Envy, War, Famine, Pestilence, Sickness, Discontent, Ignorance, Fear, [as] Mutes — to whom he gives their names — likewise Winter, Heat, Tempest, etc.; Death entered into the world; Faith, Hope, Charity, comfort and instruct him. Chorus briefly concludes.'

This is left standing; but in another part of the manuscript, as if written at some interval of time, is a fourth draft, as follows:

'*Adam Unparadized:* The Angel Gabriel, either descending or entering — showing, since the globe is created, his frequency as much on Earth as in Heaven

— describes Paradise. Next the Chorus, showing the reason of his coming — to keep his watch, after Lucifer's rebellion, by the command of God — and withal expressing his desire to see and know more concerning this excellent and new creature, Man. The Angel Gabriel, as by his name signifying a Prince of Power, passes by the station of the Chorus, and, desired by them, relates what he knew of Man, as the creation of Eve, with their love and marriage. — After this, Lucifer appears, after his overthrow; bemoans himself; seeks revenge upon Man. The Chorus prepares resistance at his first approach. At last, after discourse of enmity on either side, he departs; whereat the Chorus sing of the battle and victory in Heaven against him and his accomplices, as before, after the first Act, was sung a hymn of the Creation. — Here again may appear Lucifer, relating and consulting on what he had done to the destruction of Man. Man next and Eve, having been by this time seduced by the Serpent, appear confusedly, covered with leaves. Conscience, in a shape, accuses him; Justice cites him to the place whither Jehovah called for him. In the meantime the Chorus entertains the stage and is informed by some Angel of the manner of the Fall. Here the Chorus bewails Adam's fall. — Adam and Eve return and accuse one another; but especially Adam lays the blame to his wife — is stubborn in his offence. Justice appears, reasons with him, convinces him. The Chorus admonishes Adam, and bids him beware Lucifer's example of impenitence. — The Angel is sent to banish them out of Paradise; but, before, causes to pass before his eyes, in shapes, a masque of all the evils of this life and world. He is humbled,

relents, despairs. At last appears Mercy, comforts him, promises him the Messiah; then calls in Faith, Hope, Charity; instructs him. He repents, gives God the glory, submits to his penalty. The Chorus briefly concludes. — Compare this with the former Draft.'

These schemes of a possible drama on the subject of Paradise Lost were written out by Milton as early as between 1639 and 1642, or between his thirty-first and his thirty-fourth year, as a portion of a list of about a hundred subjects which occurred to him, in the course of his reading at that time, as worth considering for the great English poem which he hoped to give to the world. From the place and the proportion of space which they occupy in the list, it is apparent that the subject of Paradise Lost had then fascinated him more strongly than any of the others, and that, if his notion of an epic on Arthur was then given up, a drama on Paradise Lost had occurred to him as the most likely substitute. It is also more probable than not that he then knew of previous dramas that had been written on the subject, and that in writing out his own schemes he had the schemes of some of these dramas in his mind. Vondel's play was not then in existence; but Andreini's was. Farther, there is evidence in Milton's prose pamphlets published about this time that, if he did ultimately fix on the subject he had so particularly been meditating, he was likely enough to make himself acquainted with any previous efforts on the same subject, and to turn them to account for whatever they might be worth. . . .

Whether the time spent by Milton in the composition of *Paradise Lost* was five years (1658–1663), or seven or

eight years (1658–1665), it is certain that he bestowed on the work all that care and labor which, on his first contemplation of such a work in his earlier manhood, he had declared would be necessary. The 'industrious and select reading,' which he had then spoken of as one of the many requisites, had not been omitted. Whatever else *Paradise Lost* may be, it is certainly one of the most learned poems in the world. In thinking of it in this character we are to remember, first of all, that, ere his blindness had befallen him (1652), Milton's mind was stored with an amount of various and exact learning such as few other men of his age possessed; so that, had he ceased then to acquire more, he would have still carried in his memory an enormous resource of material out of which to build up the body of his poem. But he did not, after his blindness, cease to add to his knowledge by reading. At the very time when he was engaged on his *Paradise Lost*, he had, as his nephew Phillips informs us, several other great undertakings in progress of a different character, for which daily reading and research were necessary, even if they could have been dispensed with for the poem — to wit, the construction of a Body of Divinity from the Scriptures, the completion of a History of England, and the collection of materials for a Thesaurus, or Dictionary, of the Latin tongue. Laboriously every day, with a due division of his time from early morning, he pursued these tasks, by a systematic use of assistants whom he kept about him. . . .

It would not be difficult to prove, at any rate, that, among the 'select readings' engaged in specially for the purposes of *Paradise Lost* while it was in progress, must

have been readings in certain books of geography and Eastern travel, and in certain Rabbinical, early Christian, and mediaeval commentators on the subjects of Paradise, the Angels, and the Fall. Nothing is more striking in the poem, nothing more touching, than the frequency, and, on the whole, wonderful accuracy, of its references to maps; and, whatever wealth of geographical information Milton may have carried with him into his blindness, there are evidences, I think, that he must have refreshed his recollections of this kind by the eyes of others, and perhaps by their guidance of his finger, after his sight was gone. In short, for the *Paradise Lost*, as well as for the prose labors carried along with it, there must have been abundance of reading; and, remembering to what a stock of prior learning, possessed before his blindness, all such increments were added, we need have no wonder at the appearance now presented by the poem. To say merely that it is a most learned poem — the poem of a mind full of miscellaneous lore wherewith its grand imagination might work — is not enough. Original as it is, original in its entire conception, and in every portion and passage, the poem is yet full of *flakes* — we can express it no otherwise — full of flakes from all that is greatest in preceding literature, ancient or modern. This is what all the commentators have observed, and what their labors in collecting parallel passages from other poets and prose-writers have served more and more to illustrate. Such labors have been overdone; but they have proved incontestably the tenacity of Milton's memory. In the first place, *Paradise Lost* is permeated from beginning to end with citations from the Bible. Milton must have

almost had the Bible by heart; and besides that some passages of his poem, where he is keeping close to the Bible as his authority, are avowedly coagulations of Scriptural texts, it is possible again and again, throughout the rest, to detect the flash, through his noblest language, of some suggestion from the Psalms, the Prophets, the Gospels, or the Apocalypse. So, though in a less degree, with Homer, the Greek tragedians (Euripides was a special favorite of his), Plato, Demosthenes, and the Greek classics generally, and with Lucretius, Cicero, Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Juvenal, Persius, and the other Latins. So with the Italian writers whom he knew so well — Dante, Petrarch, Ariosto, Tasso, and others now less remembered. So with modern Latinists of various European countries, still less recoverable. Finally, so with the whole series of preceding English poets, particularly Spenser, Shakespeare, and some of the minor Spenserians of the reigns of James and Charles I, not forgetting that uncouth popular favorite of his boyhood, Sylvester's Du Bartas. In connection with all which, or with any particularly striking instance of the use by Milton of a thought or a phrase from previous authors, let the reader remember his own definition of plagiarism, given in his Εἰκονοκλάστης. 'Such kind of borrowing as this,' he there says, '*if it be not bettered by the borrower*, among good authors is accounted plagiary.' — And again, of quotations from the Bible: 'It is not hard for any man who hath a Bible in his hands to borrow good words and holy sayings in abundance; but to make them his own is a work of grace only from above.'[1]

[1] Masson, *The Poetical Works of John Milton* (Globe Edition), Introduction, pp. 11–17.

## VIII. MILTON'S ACCOUNT OF HIS OWN EDUCATION

My father destined me from a child to the pursuits of literature; and my appetite for knowledge was so voracious that, from twelve years of age, I hardly ever left my studies, or went to bed before midnight. This primarily led to my loss of sight. My eyes were naturally weak, and I was subject to frequent headaches; which, however, could not chill the ardor of my curiosity, or retard the progress of my improvement. My father had me daily instructed in the grammar school, and by other masters at home. He then, after I had acquired a proficiency in various languages, and had made a considerable progress in philosophy, sent me to the University of Cambridge. Here I passed seven years in the usual course of instruction and study, with the approbation of the good, and without any stain upon my character, till I took the degree of Master of Arts. After this, I did not, as this miscreant feigns, run away into Italy, but of my own accord retired to my father's house, whither I was accompanied by the regrets of most of the Fellows of the college, who showed me no common marks of friendship and esteem. On my father's estate, where he had determined to pass the remainder of his days, I enjoyed an interval of uninterrupted leisure, which I entirely devoted to the perusal of the Greek and Latin classics; though I occasionally visited the metropolis, either for the sake of purchasing books or of learning something new in mathematics or music, in which I at that time found a source of pleasure and amusement. In this manner I spent five years till my mother's death.

I then became anxious to visit foreign parts, and particularly Italy. . . . Taking ship at Nice, I arrived at Genoa, and afterwards visited Leghorn, Pisa, and Florence. In the latter city, which I have always more particularly esteemed for the elegance of its dialect, its genius, and its taste, I stopped about two months; when I contracted an intimacy with many persons of rank and learning, and was a constant attendant at their literary parties — a practice which prevails there, and tends so much to the diffusion of knowledge and the preservation of friendship. . . . When I was preparing to pass over into Sicily and Greece, the melancholy intelligence which I received of the civil commotions in England made me alter my purpose. . . . By the favor of God, I got safe back to Florence, where I was received with as much affection as if I had returned to my native country. There I stopped as many months as I had done before, except that I made an excursion for a few days to Lucca; and, crossing the Apennines, passed through Bologna and Ferrara to Venice. After I had spent a month in surveying the curiosities of this city, and had put on board a ship the books which I had collected in Italy, I proceeded through Verona and Milan, and along the Leman Lake to Geneva. . . . At Geneva I held daily conferences with John Diodati, the learned Professor of Theology. Then pursuing my former route through France, I returned to my native country, after an absence of one year and about three months. . . . As soon as I was able, I hired a spacious house in the city for myself and my books, where I again with rapture renewed my literary pursuits.[1]

[1] *Second Defense. Prose Works* (Bohn Edition) 1. 254 ff.

I would be heard only, if it might be, by the elegant and learned reader, to whom principally for a while I shall beg leave I may address myself. To him it will be no new thing though I tell him that, if I hunted after praise by the ostentation of wit and learning, I should not write thus out of mine own season, when I have neither yet completed to my mind the full circle of my private studies — although I complain not of any insufficiency to the matter in hand; or, were I ready to my wishes, it were a folly to commit anything elaborately composed to the careless and interrupted listening of these tumultuous times. Next, if I were wise only to my own ends, I would certainly take such a subject as of itself might catch applause (whereas this hath all the disadvantages on the contrary), and such a subject as the publishing whereof might be delayed at pleasure, and time enough to pencil it over with all the curious touches of art, even to the perfection of a faultless picture; whenas in this argument the not deferring is of great moment to the good speeding, that, if solidity have leisure to do her office, art cannot have much. . . . I must say, therefore, that, after I had for my first years by the ceaseless diligence and care of my father (whom God recompense!) been exercised to the tongues and some sciences, as my age would suffer, by sundry masters and teachers both at home and at the schools, it was found that, whether aught was imposed me by them that had the overlooking or betaken to of mine own choice, in English or other tongue, prosing or versing — but chiefly this latter, — the style, by certain vital signs it had, was likely to live. But much latelier in the private Academies of Italy, whither I was favored

to resort, perceiving that some trifles which I had in memory, composed at under twenty or thereabout (for the manner is that every one must give some proof of his wit and reading there), met with acceptance above what was looked for; and other things, which I had shifted in scarcity of books and conveniences to patch up amongst them, were received with written encomiums, which the Italian is not forward to bestow on men of this side the Alps; I began thus far to assent both to them and divers of my friends here at home, and not less to an inward prompting which now grew daily upon me, that by labor and intense study (which I take to be my portion in this life), joined with the strong propensity of nature, I might perhaps leave something so written to aftertimes, as they should not willingly let it die. . . .

The thing which I had to say, and those intentions which have lived within me ever since I could conceive myself anything worth to my country, I return to crave excuse that urgent reason hath plucked from me, by an abortive and foredated discovery. And the accomplishment of them lies not but in a power above man's to promise; but that none hath by more studious ways endeavored, and with more unwearied spirit that none shall, that I dare almost aver of myself, as far as life and free leisure will extend. . . . Neither do I think it shame to covenant with any knowing reader that for some few years yet I may go on trust with him toward the payment of what I am now indebted, as being a work not to be raised from the heat of youth, or the vapors of wine — like that which flows at waste from the pen of some vulgar amorist, or the trencher fury of a rhyming parasite;

nor to be obtained by the invocation of Dame Memory and her siren daughters, but by devout prayer to that Eternal Spirit who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his Seraphim with the hallowed fire of his altar, to touch and purify the lips of whom he pleases. To this must be added industrious and select reading, steady observation, insight into all seemly and generous arts and affairs; till which in some measure be compassed, at mine own peril and cost I refuse not to sustain this expectation from as many as are not loth to hazard so much credulity upon the best pledges that I can give them. Although it nothing content me to have disclosed thus much beforehand, but that I trust hereby to make it manifest with what small willingness I endure to interrupt the pursuit of no less hopes than these, and leave a calm and pleasing solitariness, fed with cheerful and confident thoughts, to embark in a troubled sea of noises and hoarse disputes, put from beholding the bright countenance of truth in the quiet and still air of delightful studies, to come into the dim reflection of hollow antiquities sold by the seeming bulk, and there be fain to club quotations with men whose learning and belief lies in marginal stuffings. . . . Let any gentle apprehension, that can distinguish learned pains from unlearned drudgery, imagine what pleasure or profoundness can be in this. . . .[1]

I had my time, readers, as others have who have good learning bestowed upon them, to be sent to those places where the opinion was it might be soonest attained; and,

[1] *The Reason of Church Government urged against Prelaty. Prose Works* 2. 476 ff.

as the manner is, was not unstudied in those authors which are most commended. Whereof some were grave orators and historians, whose matter methought I loved indeed — but, as my age then was, so I understood them; others were the smooth elegiac poets, whereof the schools are not scarce, whom both for the pleasing sound of their numerous writing (which in imitation I found most easy, and most agreeable to nature's part in me), and for their matter (which what it is there be few who know not), I was so allured to read that no recreation came to me better welcome. . . . Whence having observed them to account it the chief glory of their wit, in that they were ablest to judge, to praise, and by that could esteem themselves worthiest to love, those high perfections which under one or other name they took to celebrate; I thought with myself by every instinct and presage of nature (which is not wont to be false) that what emboldened them to this task might, with such diligence as they used, embolden me. . . .

For, by the firm settling of these persuasions, I became, to my best memory, so much a proficient that, if I found those authors anywhere speaking unworthy things of themselves, or unchaste of those names which before they had extolled, this effect it wrought with me: from that time forward their art I still applauded, but the men I deplored, and above them all preferred the two famous renowners of Beatrice and Laura, who never write but honor of them to whom they devote their verse, displaying sublime and pure thoughts without transgression. And long it was not after, when I was confirmed in this opinion, that he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter

in laudable things ought himself to be a true poem — that is, a composition and pattern of the best and honorablest things; not presuming to sing high praises of heroic men or famous cities, unless he have in himself the experience and the practice of all that which is praiseworthy. . . .

Next (for hear me out now, readers), that I may tell ye whither my younger feet wandered, I betook me among those lofty fables and romances which recount in solemn cantos the deeds of knighthood founded by our victorious kings, and from hence had in renown over all Christendom. There I read it in the oath of every knight that he should defend, to the expense of his best blood, or of his life, if it so befell him, the honor and chastity of virgin or matron; from whence even then I learned what a noble virtue chastity sure must be, to the defence of which so many worthies, by such a dear adventure of themselves, had sworn. . . .

Thus, from the laureat fraternity of poets, riper years and the ceaseless round of study and reading led me to the shady spaces of philosophy, but chiefly to the divine volumes of Plato, and his equal, Xenophon; where if I should tell ye what I learnt of chastity and love — I mean that which is truly so, whose charming cup is only virtue, which she bears in her hand to those who are worthy (the rest are cheated with a thick intoxicating potion which a certain sorceress, the abuser of love's name, carries about) — and how the first and chiefest office of love begins and ends in the soul, producing those happy twins of her divine generation, knowledge and virtue; with such abstracted sublimities as these it might be worth your listening,

readers, as I may one day hope to have ye in a still time, when there shall be no chiding. . . .

Last of all, not in time, but as perfection is last, that care was ever had of me, with my earliest capacity, not to be negligently trained in the precepts of the Christian religion.[1]

[1] *An Apology for Smectymnuus. Prose Works* 3. 116 ff.

# VI

# METHOD IN THE POETRY OF LOVE — WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

## I. BROWNING

I have gone the whole round of creation: I saw and I spoke!
I, a work of God's hand for that purpose, received in my brain
And pronounced on the rest of His handwork — returned Him again
His creation's approval or censure: I spoke as I saw.
I report, as a man may of God's work — all 's love, yet all 's law![1]

## II. THE METHOD OF THE TROUBADOURS

In his journey through purgatory Dante met Guido Guinicelli, and began to extol the 'sweet ditties' that he composed. But Guinicelli disclaimed the honor, pointed out another as the master who excelled all, and humbly effacing himself before this greatest of poets, disappeared 'through the fire, even as through the water a fish going to the bottom.' It would hardly seem possible for Dante to introduce this poet with more signal distinction; but

[1] *Saul* 17. 1–5.

he found a way — allowing him to speak, not in Tuscan, but in his own language: 'I am Arnaut, who weep and go singing.' Who was this poet? His full name was Arnaut Daniel. He was a troubadour. . . .

Dante himself bears witness that Daniel was not popular. . . . It astonishes us to hear Petrarch call him 'First among all, . . . great master of love, who still does honor to his country with his novel and beautiful diction.' We wonder still more at Dante's admiration, and the tradition of reverence that continued down even to Tasso's day. . . .

Daniel's passion for 'rich rhymes' and the obscure style was not mere affectation, mere striving for novelty. His mind was naturally reserved and self-contained, not easy and effusive. 'He that would earn praise must govern himself,' he sang; and again: 'Love bridles my mouth.' . . . Such a man was not likely to be satisfied with a ready, flowing style. Besides, he was nobly born and well educated, and naïve poetry was too simple for him. He knew and felt the power of words. Not content with the purest form of the troubadour tongue — his mother-speech — he winnowed and elaborated it. . . .

All these are the marks of an artistic poet. . . . He distinguished himself by carrying such thoughts, feelings, and imaginations as were his to their ultimate development, and expressing them with a unique force. Others personified love, but he made love speak, and even act, as a living person. While others declared that love enabled them to be joyous even when the earth was dark and gloomy, he seemed intent upon detaching himself altogether from nature and dominating it. While others

used the antithesis of word and phrase, he made it a fundamental element of his verse and of his thought.

Others had been rich in the variety of their rhymes, but he surpassed them all. To secure striking effects he ran the whole vocal gamut of vowels and consonants, and even studied to obtain haunting chords by employing almost-rhymes. Others . . . carried rhymes from stanza on to stanza; but he, to avoid commonplaces and secure more delicate results, made the rhyme within the stanza entirely subordinate. Look for a moment at [a particular example]. Out of seventeen lines only seven are capped in the same stanza; for answers to the rest the ear must wait and listen, until the corresponding line is reached in each of the six stanzas that follow.

This principle was carried to its ultimate in his sestine — that proof-piece of his wonderful skill in form — which was imitated by Dante, Petrarch, and many others. In this he completely discarded the rhyme of the stanza, and relied upon the assonances of his terminal words . . . and the subtle musical effect of their recurrence in a surprising but regular order. . . .

His refinements in metre and rhyme must have had real effect or he would not have employed them. . . . It seems to me clear that Daniel addressed ears more delicate and tenacious than ours. His verse was like the 'music of calculation.' It was like those exquisite vases which ravish our cultured vision precisely because their curves are so refined, so slight. It was like a violin air of Bach's compared with a thumping rhythm for the banjo. It was like the harmony of Chopin's scattered chords contrasted with the obvious chiming of a choral. . . .

Ribérac, the place where Arnaut Daniel — the master of technical verse — was born, is not far away. Let us take flight in that direction, and on the way change our thoughts by discussing what Daniel reminds us of — the art of the troubadours. . . .

On the side of form . . . they labored intensely at their art. Addressing as they did the most cultivated class of society, they would not have been pardoned for carelessness of manner; and finish was the more essential because their art, sprung from a popular source, yet appealing to a culture that was bent upon eliminating every trace of boorishness, needed to assume a style no less distinguished than the courtly bearing of its patrons. For these reasons, and for others, form became an essential feature of Provençal verse, and some knowledge of its technique is both valuable and interesting.

Of course there were no schools or professors of poetics for the education of troubadours. The chivalric, self-sacrificing spirit of the time disposed their hearts vaguely toward passionate devotion, love supplied the impulse to sing, and a friendly poet was very likely among the aspirant's acquaintances to give advice and criticism; but their real instruction was the imitation of approved and favorite songs, which worked in their minds as the ancient lyrics of Scotland worked in the thoughts of plowman Burns. During the whole creative period this was all: theories, principles, and rules did not exist in any systematic form. But about the time Dante's life was closing, the usages of poetical writing were compiled under the auspices of the College of the Gay Science at Toulouse; and from this treatise, entitled *Las Leys*

*Damors* (*The Laws of Love*), and from the works of the masters, we can learn the principles of troubadour art. . . .

The chief originality, and the great artistic triumph, of the Provençal poets lay in the construction of the stanza. The popular poetry had bound together two or more lines of the same kind in longer or shorter stanzas, each of which was logically complete; but the troubadour, gaining a truer simplicity through an apparent complexity, united lines of every sort in stanzas of any number of lines from three to forty-two, and carried the sense along from the beginning to the end of the piece.

It was rhyme that bound the lines together, of course; and that is why the troubadours accomplished so much for the stanza. To be sure, they did not invent rhyme. The germ of it has been found . . . in the assonances and alliterations of Roman rhetoric, and before their time it had been employed in Latin verse; but they seized upon rhyme with a new vigor, and made it serve them as it has served no other poets. . . .

With perfect freedom as to the number of lines in a stanza, the length of the lines, the kinds of rhyme, and the disposal of the rhymes, it was possible to devise an almost infinite variety of stanza-forms. Naturally, certain forms became standard, but every poet was at liberty to contrive new ones. In fact, he was expected to show his talent in precisely this way, and theoretically every song was to have a pattern of its own. The result was an unbounded luxuriance of ingenious forms. *The Laws of Love* describe thirty-four different ways of rhyming, each with a name of its own, and seventy-two kinds of stanzas, all of them labeled in a similar way; but this was only

a beginning, and Maus has counted up 817 distinct patterns in the works of the troubadours. The abundance of rhymes in Provençal contributed no little to stimulate this variety: Peire de Corbiac, for instance, could invent 840 lines ending with the same sound.

But rhyme did only half its work in binding lines together; it also brought the stanzas into one. . . . Occasionally when the stanza was very long, or when all the lines of it rhymed together, as in Sordel's *Lament*, each stanza had its own rhymes. Occasionally stanzas were grouped in twos or threes, and each group had new rhymes. But the grand rule was that all, or at least a number of the rhymes, were carried through the piece, and no other poets have followed out this principle of unity so completely as the troubadours. Frequently, as we have discovered, a line was not capped at all in its own stanza, but found its answer at the same point in the other stanzas; and this hide and seek of the rhymes was no doubt a very pleasant feature of the art in Provençal ears. One rule was absolute: the pattern might be anything, but, once adopted, it must be followed to the end, and all the stanzas made precisely alike.

There were still other ways to give an impression of unity. Sometimes the ends of lines that did not rhyme together had a certain similarity of sound — for example: *-ars*, *-ors*, *-urs*, *-aire*, *-ars*, *-ors*, *-ers*, *-aire*. Sometimes there was a refrain — perhaps only a single word — repeated at the end, or in the middle, or even at the beginning of each stanza. Sometimes the last rhyme of a stanza became the first of the succeeding stanza, or the last word or line of one stanza opened the next, or

the rhymes of the second half of a stanza were used in the first half of the following one. It is useless to enumerate such devices, for the variety was endless.

Was it worth while?

Certainly the rhymes assisted the singer to remember his lines, and no doubt they were also an aid to the poet. The very difficulty of them improved his work, for it was a challenge and a spur to his powers. Besides, rhyme is a mode of thinking, as metre is. The true rhetorician does not think first and then clothe his ideas with figurative language — he thinks in figures; and in a similar way the real verse-maker finds rhyme and metre, not obstacles to be overcome, but wings to bear him up. The listener, too, was not without a profit. Rhyme is an appeal to both recollection and anticipation. It recalls a past pleasure, and suggests that a pleasure is approaching; and the regular though infinitely varied recurrences of pleasant sounds, running entirely through a Provençal song, leave in one's ear the charm of distant music, faint but real, fugitive but haunting.

A merit equally rational may by found in almost all of the troubadours' devices. However ingenious the pattern, all the chief poets were agreed that no technical skill was of any value unless it had feeling behind it; and we may fairly look upon the intricacies of the best Provençal verse as not in any way akin to the spiritless artificiality of acrostics and the like, but as the natural embroidery of branch and leaf, instinct with life and the vernal spirit, forced sometimes, but never falsified by hot-house conditions. . . .

By the rule — not always followed — every stanza broke into two parts at a strong pause called the *volta*,

and then one or the other of these parts broke again into exact halves, sung to the same strain of music, so that the stanza had three sections. In a similar way, as it is held, the song as a whole was intended to show a threefold partition of stanzas. This, indeed, was of minor importance, but the division of the stanza was a fundamental principle. From Provence it passed on to Italy, and Dante expounded it with great emphasis and clearness. England imported it from Italy in the sonnet, and so our own poets fall back now and then upon the art of the troubadours. . . .

It is not rare to find them speaking of the labor expended on their verse. With one it was 'building' a song; with another it was 'forging'; with a third it was 'working out.' They often confessed the pains taken to refine their pieces. Daniel and others used the 'file.' At length every word lay precisely as the poet wished, and all were so deftly fitted together that a joglar could hardly change one without conscious effort. And then — perhaps with an injunction to alter nothing — the finished work was published through the joglars, and set going from castle to castle and from lip to lip.[1]

[1] Justin H. Smith, *The Troubadours at Home* 1. 188 ff.; 2. 283 ff. By permission.

## III. A METHOD OF STUDY SUGGESTED BY THE PRACTICE OF DANTE

It were a shameful thing if one should rhyme under the semblance of metaphor or rhetorical similitude, and afterwards, being questioned thereof, should be unable to rid his words of such semblance, unto their right understanding. Of whom (to wit, of such as rhyme thus foolishly) myself and the first among my friends do know many.[1]

I, thinking that . . . it were well to say somewhat of the nature of Love, and also in accordance with my friend's desire, proposed to myself to write certain words in the which I should treat of this argument. And the sonnet that I then made is this:

Love and the gentle heart are one same thing,
  Even as the wise man in his ditty saith:
  Each, of itself, would be such life in death
As rational soul bereft of reasoning.
'T is Nature makes them when she loves: a king
  Love is, whose palace where he sojourneth
  Is called the Heart; there draws he quiet breath
At first, with brief or longer slumbering.
Then beauty seen in virtuous womankind
  Will make the eyes desire, and through the heart
    Send the desiring of the eyes again;
Where often it abides so long enshrined
  That Love at length out of his sleep will start.
    And women feel the same for worthy men.

This sonnet is divided into two parts. In the first, I speak of him according to his power. In the second,

[1] Dante, *The New Life* (tr. Rossetti), p. 73.

I speak of him according as his power translates itself into act. The second part begins here: 'Then beauty seen.' The first is divided into two. In the first, I say in what subject this power exists. In the second, I say how this subject and this power are produced together, and how the one regards the other, as form does matter. The second begins here: ''T is Nature.' Afterwards when I say, 'Then beauty seen in virtuous womankind,' I say how this power translates itself into act; and, first, how it so translates itself in a man, then how it so translates itself in a woman; here: 'And women feel.'

Having treated of love in the foregoing, it appeared to me that I should also say something in praise of my lady, wherein it might be set forth how love manifested itself when produced by her; and how not only she could awaken it where it slept, but where it was not she could marvelously create it. To the which end I wrote another sonnet; and it is this:

My lady carries love within her eyes;
All that she looks on is made pleasanter;
Upon her path men turn to gaze at her;
He whom she greeteth feels his heart to rise,
And droops his troubled visage, full of sighs,
And of his evil heart is then aware:
Hate loves, and pride becomes a worshiper.
O women, help to praise her in some wise.
Humbleness, and the hope that hopeth well,
By speech of hers into the mind are brought,
And who beholds is blessed oftenwhiles.
The look she hath when she a little smiles
Cannot be said, nor holden in the thought;
'T is such a new and gracious miracle.

This sonnet has three sections. In the first, I say how this lady brings this power into action by those most noble features, her eyes; and, in the third, I say this same as to that most noble feature, her mouth. And between these two sections is a little section, which asks, as it were, help for the previous section and the subsequent; and it begins here: 'O women, help.' The third begins here: 'Humbleness.' The first is divided into three; for, in the first, I say how she with power makes noble that which she looks upon; and this is as much as to say that she brings Love, in power, thither where he is not. In the second, I say how she brings Love, in act, into the hearts of all those whom she sees. In the third, I tell what she afterwards, with virtue, operates upon their hearts. The second begins: 'Upon her path'; the third: 'He whom she greeteth.' Then, when I say, 'O women, help,' I intimate to whom it is my intention to speak, calling on women to help me to honor her. Then, when I say, 'Humbleness,' I say that same which is said in the first part, regarding two acts of her mouth, one whereof is her most sweet speech, and the other her marvelous smile. Only, I say not of this last how it operates upon the hearts of others, because memory cannot retain this smile, nor its operation.[1]

[1] Dante, *The New Life* (tr. Rossetti), pp. 57 ff.

## IV. ON THE STRUCTURE OF THE *VITA NUOVA*

It is to be observed, upon close examination, that the poems of the *Vita Nuova* are arranged in such order as to suggest an intention on the part of Dante to give his work a symmetrical structure. If the arrangement be accidental, or governed simply by the relation of the poems to the sequence of the events described in the narrative which connects them, it is certainly curious that they happened to fall into such order as to give to the little book a surprising regularity of construction.

The succession of the thirty-one poems of the *New Life* is as follows:

5 sonnets
1 ballad
4 sonnets
1 canzone
4 sonnets
1 canzone
3 sonnets
1 imperfect canzone
1 canzone
1 sonnet
1 imperfect canzone
8 sonnets

At first sight no regularity appears in their order, but a little analysis reveals it. The most important poems, not only from their form and length, but also from their substance, are the three canzoni. Now it will be observed that the first canzone is preceded by ten, and followed by four, minor poems. The second canzone, which is by far the most elaborate poem of the whole, stands alone, holding the central place in the volume. The third canzone is

preceded by four, and followed by ten, minor poems, like the first in inverse order. Thus the arrangement appears as follows:

10 minor poems
1 canzone
4 minor poems
1 canzone
4 minor poems
1 canzone
10 minor poems

Here, leaving the central canzone to stand by itself, we have three series of ten poems each. It will be observed further that the first and the third canzone stand at the same distance from the central poem, and that ten minor poems separate the one from the beginning, the other from the end of the book, and in each instance nine of these poems are sonnets. It is also worth remark that while the first canzone is followed by four sonnets, and the third is preceded by three sonnets and an imperfect canzone, this imperfect canzone is a single stanza, which has the same number of lines, and the same arrangement of its lines in respect to rhyme, as a sonnet, differing in this respect from the other canzoni. It may be fairly classed as a sonnet, its only difference from one being in the name that Dante has given to it.

The symmetrical construction now appears still more clearly:

10 minor poems, all but one of them sonnets
1 canzone
4 sonnets
1 canzone
4 sonnets
1 canzone
10 minor poems, all but one of them sonnets

It may be taken as evidence that this regularity of arrangement was intentional, that a comparison of the first with the third canzone shows them to be mutually related, one being the balance of the other. The first begins :

Donne ch' avete intelletto d' amore
Io vo' con voi della mia donna dire ;

and the last line of its first stanza is :

Chè non è cosa da parlarne altrui.

In the first stanza of the third there is a distinct reference to these words :

E perchè mi ricorda ch' io parlai
Della mia donna, mentre che vivia,
Donne gentili, volentier con vui,
Non vo' parlarne altrui
Se non a cor gentil che 'n donna sia.

The second stanza of the first canzone relates to the desire which is felt in Heaven for Beatrice. The corresponding stanza of the third declares that it was this desire for her which led to her being taken from the world. The third stanza of the one relates to the operation of her virtues and beauties upon earth ; of the other, to the remembrance of them. There is a similarity of expression to be traced throughout.

In the last stanza, technically called the *commiato*, or dismissal, in which the poem is personified and sent on its way, in the first canzone it is called *figliuola d'amor*, in the third, *figliuola di tristizia*. One was the daughter of love, the other of sorrow ; one was the poem recording Beatrice's life, the other her death. It is thus that one

is made to serve as the complement and balance of the other, in the structure of the *New Life*.

It may be possible to trace a similar relation between some of the minor poems of the beginning and the end of the volume; but I have not observed it, if it exists.

The second canzone is, as I have said, the most important poem in the volume, from the force of imagination displayed in it, as well as from its serving to connect the life of Beatrice with her death; and thus it holds, as of right, its central position in relation to the poems which precede and follow it.

But another, not less numerically symmetrical division of these poems, no longer according to their form, but according to their subject, may be observed by the careful reader. The first ten of them relate to the beginning of Dante's love, and to his own early experiences as a lover. At their close he says that it seemed to him he had said enough of his own state, and that it behoved him to take up *a new theme*, and that he thereupon resolved thenceforth to make the praise of his Lady his sole theme (cc. xvii, xviii). This theme is the ruling motive of the next ten poems. The last of them is interrupted by the death of Beatrice, and thereafter he takes up, as he again says, *a new theme*, and the next ten poems are devoted to his affliction, to the episode of the gentle lady, and to his return to his faithful love of Beatrice. One poem, the last, remains. It differs from all the rest; he calls it *a new thing*. It is the consummation of his experience of love in the vision of his Lady in glory.

It is to be noted as a peculiarity of this final poem, and an indication of its composition at a later period than

those which precede it, that whereas the visions which they report have reference, without exception, to things which the poet had experienced, or seen, or fancied, when awake, thus appearing to be dependent on previous waking excitements, the vision related in this sonnet seems, on the contrary, to have had its origin in no external circumstance, but to be the result of a purely internal condition of feeling. It was a *new* Intelligence that led his sigh upwards — a new Intelligence which prepared him for his vision at Easter in 1300.

If a reason be inquired for that might lead Dante thus symmetrically to arrange the poems of this little book in a triple series of ten around a central unit, or in a triple series of ten, followed by a single poem in which he is guided to Heaven by a new Intelligence, it may perhaps be found in the value which he set upon ten as the perfect number; while in the three times repeated series, culminating in a single central or final poem, he may have pleased himself with some fanciful analogy to that three and one on which he dwells in the passage in which he treats of the friendliness of the number nine to Beatrice. At any rate, as he there says, 'this is the reason which I see for it, and which best pleases me; though perchance a more subtile reason might be seen therein by a more subtile person.'[1]

[1] Charles Eliot Norton, *The New Life of Dante Alighieri*, pp. 129–134.

## V. SOME OF THE TOPICS DISCUSSED BY DANTE IN HIS TREATISE *DE VULGARI ELOQUENTIA*

The illustrious Italian language is equally fit for use in prose and in verse.

The illustrious language must only be used in treating of the worthiest subjects, that is, Arms, Love, and Virtue.

The canzone is the noblest form of poetry.

Of the different lines admissible in canzoni. The line of eleven syllables is the stateliest, and therefore the most eligible; next come the lines of seven, five, and three syllables.

Of construction, that is, the arrangement of words in sentences.

Classification of the words admissible in canzoni.

The canzone defined as a joining together of stanzas; definition of the stanza.

The arrangement of the parts of the stanza; the relation between its several parts in regard to the number of lines and syllables they contain.

Arrangement of the parts of the stanza in relation to the different kinds of lines employed.

Rhyme in relation to the arrangement of the different parts of the stanza.

The number of lines and syllables in the stanza.[1]

[1] From the translation by A. G. Ferrers Howell. *The Latin Works of Dante* (Temple Classics), pp. 65 ff.

## VI. THE METHOD OF PETRARCH

The pleasure of living his youth over again, of meeting Laura in every line, of examining the history of his own heart — and perhaps the consciousness which, after all, rarely misleads authors respecting the best of their works — induced the poet in his old age to give to his love-verses a perfection which has never been attained by any other Italian writer, and which he thinks 'he could not himself have carried farther.' If the manuscripts did not still exist, it would be impossible to imagine or believe the unwearied pains he has bestowed on the correction of his verses. They are curious monuments, although they afford little aid in exploring by what secret workings the long and laborious meditation of Petrarch has spread over his poetry all the natural charms of sudden and irresistible inspiration.

The following is a literal translation of a succession of memorandums in Latin, at the head of one of his sonnets:

'I began this by the impulse of the Lord [*Domino iubente*], 10th September, at the dawn of day, after my morning prayers.'

'I must make these two verses over again, singing them [*cantando*], and I must transpose them — 3 o'clock, A.M., 19th October.'

'I like this [*hoc placet*] — 30th October, 10 o'clock in the morning.'

'No; this does not please me — 20th December, in the evening.'

And in the midst of his corrections he writes, on laying down his pen: 'I shall return to this again; I am called to supper.'

'February 18th, towards noon — this is now well; however, look at it again [*vide tamen adhuc*].'

Sometimes he notes the town where he happens to be: '1364, *Veneris mane*, 19 *Jan.*, *dum invitus Patavii ferior*.' It might seem rather a curious than useful remark that it was generally on Friday that he occupied himself with the painful labor of correction, did we not also know that it was to him a day of fast and penitence.

When any thought occurred to him, he noted it in the midst of his verses, thus: 'Consider this. I had some thoughts of transposing these lines, and of making the first verse the last, but I have not done so — for the sake of harmony; the first would then be more sonorous, and the last less so, which is against rule; for the end should be more harmonious than the beginning.' Sometimes he says: 'The commencement is good, but it is not pathetic enough.' In some places he suggests to himself to repeat the same words rather than the same ideas. In others he judges it better not to multiply the ideas, but to amplify them with other expressions. Every verse is turned in several different ways; above each phrase and each word he frequently places equivalent expressions, in order to examine them again; and it requires a profound knowledge of Italian to perceive that, after such perplexing scruples, he always adopts those words which combine at once most harmony, elegance, and energy.

These laborious corrections gave rise to an opinion, even in the lifetime of Petrarch, that his verses were the work less of a lover than of a poet. It is indubitably true that that passion cannot be very strong which we are at leisure to describe. But a man of genius feels more intensely, and suffers more strongly, than another; and for this very reason, when the force of his passion has subsided, he retains for a longer period the recollection of what it has been, and can more easily imagine himself again under its influence; and, in my conception, what we call the power of imagination is chiefly the combination of strong feelings and recollections. Thus a man of genius is peculiarly gifted with the faculty of observing the secret workings of human nature as she prevails in his own heart, and in the hearts of all mankind; and is enabled to describe those feelings, and bring them home to every reader. The great secret of the poet's art is to make us feel our existence by the force of sympathy; but at the moment that he groans under his own sufferings, it is impossible for him to examine the workings of his heart or those of others; and the lyrical poetry of Petrarch, which may be read in the course of a few days, was written during a period of thirty-two years. Many of the pieces, no doubt, were conceived at moments when he was under the immediate influence of his passion, but were written many days, perhaps many months, and certainly perfected many years, afterwards. The forty-eighth sonnet of the first part of his collection was written eleven years after his acquaintance with Laura. . . . Four years after this last epoch he wrote the eighty-fifth sonnet. . . . During the course of this

year, and the whole of the next, he composed only eleven sonnets; for the ninety-sixth began:

Rimansi addietro il *sestodecim'* anno;

and the ninety-seventh:

*Dicesett'* anni ha già rivolto il Cielo.

Thus in these *twelve* months he wrote only fourteen verses to Laura. Indeed, if his mind had experienced no intervals of calm, he would never have been able to execute those conceptions, and still less to correct them. He would not have lived so long; or, if he had lived, it would have been in that state of disquietude and inaction inseparable from agitated feelings. The harmony, elegance, and perfection of his poetry are the result of long labor; but its original conceptions and pathos always sprang from the sudden inspirations of a deep and powerful passion. By an attentive perusal of all the writings of Petrarch it may be reduced almost to a certainty that by dwelling perpetually on the same ideas, and by allowing his mind to prey incessantly on itself, the whole train of his feelings and reflections acquired one strong character and tone; and if he was ever able to suppress them for a time, they returned to him with increased violence; that, to tranquilize this agitated state of his mind, he, in the first instance, communicated in a free and loose manner all that he thought and felt, in his correspondence with his intimate friends; that he afterwards reduced these narratives, with more order and description, into Latin verse; and that he, lastly, perfected them with a greater profusion of imagery, and more art, in his Italian

poetry, the composition of which at first served only, as he frequently says, 'to divert and mitigate all his afflictions.'

We may thus understand the perfect concord which prevails in Petrarch's poetry between nature and art; between the accuracy of fact and the magic of invention; between depth and perspicuity; between devouring passion and calm meditation. In three or four verses of Italian he often condenses the description, and concentrates the fire, which fill a page of his elegies and letters in Latin. It is precisely because the poetry of Petrarch originally sprang from his heart that his passion never seems fictitious or cold, notwithstanding the profuse ornament of his style, or the metaphysical elevation of his thoughts. In the movement of Laura's eyes he sees a light which points out the way to heaven. . . . He exclaims that 'the atmosphere becomes smiling, luminous, and serene at her approach'; . . . that 'the air which is breathed around her is so purified by the celestial radiance of her countenance that, while he fixes his eyes upon her, every sensual desire is extinguished.' . . . Still he is always natural.[1]

## VII. THE METHOD OF GEORGE HERBERT

To-day it is usual to make a sharp distinction between the real and the artificial; but Herbert knows no such contrast. When he is most artificial, he is all aglow with passion; and when he describes one of his own moods, he is full of constructive artifice. That he was a truly religious man, no one will doubt.[2]

[1] Ugo Foscolo, *Essays on Petrarch* (London, 1823), pp. 56–63.
[2] Palmer, *Life and Works of George Herbert* 1. 118.

In calling attention to Herbert's ability to shape a poem as a whole, we may claim for him a high degree of originality. Little had been done in this kind before. Our early lyric poetry is more remarkable for vividness than for form. Its writers feel keenly and speak daringly. By some means or other they usually succeed in stirring in their reader's heart feelings similar to their own. But not often do they show that sense of order and coherence which is expected in every other species of fine art. Perhaps words are easier material than paint, stone, or sound, and lend themselves more readily to caprice. Of course without a certain sequence no lyric could picture a poet's feeling. Near the beginning the occasion of the feeling is announced; then follow its manifestations; and at the close it is usually connected in some way with action, resolve, or judgment. Such an emotional scheme is often unfolded with much delicacy and evenness in the songs of Campion, and in both the songs and sonnets of Sidney and Shakespeare.

But these are vague divisions, the second especially so. They do not alone give firmness of form. They make poetic writing rather than finished poems. Stirred by some passion, real or imaginary, the poet begins to write, pours forth his feeling until the supply, or the reader, is exhausted, and then stops. He has no predetermined beginning, middle, and end. *Part with part has* no *private amitie.* The place and amount of each portion is fixed by no plan of the whole, but rather by the waywardness of the writer. In most early lyrics, even the best, stanzas might be omitted, added, or transposed, without considerable damage. Each stands pretty much

by itself. In the two stanzas of Ben Jonson's stirring song, *Drink to me only with thine eyes*, neither is necessary to the other. Those of his *Queen and huntress chaste and fair* might about as well have taken any other order. This is the more remarkable because into the drama Jonson carried form in much the same conscious way that Herbert carried it into lyric poetry. But if in the early lyrists the desire for closely-knitted structure is slight, it is feebler still in the writers of reflective verse. These men wander wherever thought or a good phrase leads, and are rarely restrained by any compacted plan. In short, we read most of the early poetry for the sake of splendid bursts, vigorous stanzas, pithy lines. To obtain these, we willingly pass through much that is formless and uninteresting. Seldom do we get singleness of impression. Sidney, in his *Defense of Poesy*, complained of the poets of his day that their 'matter is *quodlibet*,' which they never marshal 'into any assured rank,' so that 'the readers cannot tell where to find themselves.' Until Herbert appeared, unity of structure was little regarded.

To such articulated structure Herbert devoted himself, and what he accomplished forms one of his two considerable contributions to English poetry. In his pages we see for the first time a great body of lyrics in which the matter and the form are at one. Impulsive and ardent though Herbert seems, he holds himself like a true artist responsive to his shaping theme. Not that he acquires power of this sort at once, or has it always. *The Church-Porch* is loose, and in many of the ecclesiastical poems of his Cambridge years, there is only such general structure

as springs from announced theme, emotional development, and moral ending. But the demand for form is deep in him, and more and more he puts himself at its service. In something like a quarter of his work he attains a solidity of structure hitherto unknown. That his achievements in this field exercised little influence over his immediate successors is true, and surprising. But he set the most difficult of examples. Strong form is not catching. Only a man of energy and restraint is capable of it. Other qualities, too, of Herbert's style obscured his form. So rich is he in suggestion, so intellectually difficult, so tender in religious appeal, that attention is easily withdrawn from his structure, and becomes fixed on details. Whatever the cause, the poets who follow him, and are most affected by his invention of the religious love-lyric, have small regard for his second invention — structural plan. C. Harvey, Vaughan, Crashaw, Traherne, are conspicuously lacking in restraint. They do not appear to notice the artistic weaving of Herbert's verse, which has brought it through the rough usage of nearly three centuries, while their own often more brilliant work now lies largely neglected. Even to-day few think of Herbert as one of our pioneers in poetic structure.

Briefly to present the evidence for this solidity of form is not easy. The point to be proved is not that Herbert exercised remarkable skill in building certain poems. Occasional fine structure was not unknown before. What Herbert did was to vindicate unity of design as a working factor of poetry. He showed how by its use much may be said in little. He made it plain that any theme, if fully and economically embodied, will not

lack interest. It is therefore the frequency of his work in this kind which I wish to show. This I think I can do most effectively by dividing his one hundred and sixty-nine poems into four groups, according to the prevalence in them of the principle of form. There appear to be fifty-eight in which there is no wandering from a predetermined plan.[1]

Among Herbert's poems there is one called *Hope*, which may be taken as a fair specimen of the difficulties of his verse, with its conceits, its condensation and ellipses of thought, where spontaneity and reality seem to be overshadowed by ingenuity. And yet beneath these outward signs there runs the sad intensity of passion. The poem is here given, with Mr. Palmer's interpretation. . . .

HOPE

I gave to Hope a watch of mine; but he
An anchor gave to me.
Then an old prayer book I did present;
And he an optick sent.
With that I gave a viall full of tears;
But he a few green eares.
Ah Loyterer! I 'le no more, no more I 'le bring.
I did expect a ring.

Mr. Palmer connects the poem with the contradictions of love, a constant subject with Herbert. His lines might have been called '*The Weariness of Hope*': 'To Love I gave my time, prayers, and tears; serving Love long, and getting small return, I remind him of time passing, prayers offered, tears shed; still he gives only hopes, visions, immature fruit; I despair.' Translating into

[1] Palmer, *Life and Works of George Herbert* 1. 138–142.

abstract terms Herbert's imagery of things, the sequence of his thought might be represented thus:

To Love I said: 'Hast thou forgotten Time?'
'Time counts for naught with Love, for Love is Hope.'
But I prayed still the prayer I ever prayed.
'Look far away,' said Love, 'not on things near.' I wept.
'Nay, here and now is fruit,' he said. 'Unripe indeed.'
'Why such delay?' cried I. 'Give all or none!'[1]

## VIII. GEORGE HERBERT: *LOVE UNKNOWN*

['This is the only poem in which Herbert professes to speak with a friend; and the friend is but another mood of Herbert himself (line 11).' — Palmer. The structure of the poem is obvious.]

Dear Friend, sit down; the tale is long and sad;
And in my faintings I presume your love
Will more comply than help. A Lord I had,
And have, of whom some grounds which may improve
I hold for two lives, and both lives in me.
To him I brought a dish of fruit one day,
And in the middle placed my heart. But he
(I sigh to say)
Looked on a servant who did know his eye
Better than you know me, or (which is one)
Than I myself. The servant instantly,
Quitting the fruit, seized on my heart alone
And threw it in a font wherein did fall
A stream of blood which issued from the side
Of a great rock. I well remember all
And have good cause. There it was dipped and dyed,

[1] A. V. G. Allen, *Palmer's Herbert* in the *Atlantic Monthly* 97. 97.

And washed and wrung; the very wringing yet
Enforceth tears. *Your heart was foul, I fear.*
Indeed 't is true. I did and do commit
Many a fault more than my lease will bear,
Yet still asked pardon, and was not denied.
But you shall hear. After my heart was well,
And clean and fair, as I one eventide
(I sigh to tell)
Walked by myself abroad, I saw a large
And spacious furnace flaming, and thereon
A boiling cauldron round about whose verge
Was in great letters set AFFLICTION.
The greatness showed the owner. So I went
To fetch a sacrifice out of my fold,
Thinking with that which I did thus present
To warm his love, which I did fear grew cold.
But as my heart did tender it, the man
Who was to take it from me slipped his hand,
And threw my heart into the scalding pan —
My heart, that brought it (do you understand?) —
The offerer's heart. *Your heart was hard, I fear.*
Indeed 't is true. I found a callous matter
Began to spread and to expatiate there;
But with a richer drug than scalding water
I bathed it often, even with holy blood,
Which at a board, while many drunk bare wine,
A friend did steal into my cup for good,
Even taken inwardly, and most divine
To supple hardnesses. But at the length
Out of the cauldron getting, soon I fled
Unto my house, where to repair the strength

Which I had lost, I hasted to my bed.
But when I thought to sleep out all these faults
(I sigh to speak)
I found that some had stuffed the bed with thoughts,
I would say *thorns*. Dear, could my heart not break,
When with my pleasures even my rest was gone?
Full well I understood who had been there,
For I had given the key to none but one.
It must be he. *Your heart was dull, I fear.*
Indeed a slack and sleepy state of mind
Did oft possess me, so that when I prayed,
Though my lips went, my heart did stay behind.
But all my scores were by another paid,
Who took the debt upon him. *Truly, Friend,*
*For aught I hear, your Master shows to you*
*More favor than you wot of. Mark the end:*
*The Font did only what was old renew,*
*The Cauldron suppled what was grown too hard,*
*The Thorns did quicken what was grown too dull,*
*All did but strive to mend what you had marred.*
*Wherefore be cheered, and praise him to the full*
*Each day, each hour, each moment of the week,*
*Who fain would have you be new, tender, quick.*

## IX. SOCRATES ON THE PRINCIPLES OF COMPOSITION

*Socrates.* Will you tell me whether I defined love at the beginning of my speech? for, having been in an ecstasy, I cannot well remember.

*Phaedrus.* Yes, indeed; that you did, and no mistake.

*Soc.* Then I perceive that the Nymphs of Achelous and Pan the son of Hermes, who inspired me, were far better rhetoricians than Lysias the son of Cephalus. Alas! how inferior to them he is! But perhaps I am mistaken; and Lysias at the commencement of his lover's speech did insist on our supposing love to be something or other which he fancied him to be, and according to this model he fashioned and framed the remainder of his discourse. Suppose we read his beginning over again.

*Phaedr.* If you please; but you will not find what you want.

*Soc.* Read, that I may have his exact words.

*Phaedr.* 'You know how matters stand with me, and how, as I conceive, they might be arranged for our common interest; and I maintain I ought not to fail in my suit because I am not your lover, for lovers repent of the kindnesses which they have shown, when their love is over.'

*Soc.* Here he appears to have done just the reverse of what he ought; for he has begun at the end, and is swimming on his back through the flood to the place of starting. His address to the fair youth begins where the lover would have ended. Am I not right, sweet Phaedrus?

*Phaedr.* Yes, indeed, Socrates; he does begin at the end.

*Soc.* Then as to the other topics — are they not thrown down anyhow? Is there any principle in them? Why should the next topic follow next in order, or any other topic? I cannot help fancying in my ignorance that he wrote off boldly just what came into his head, but I dare say that you would recognize a rhetorical necessity in the succession of the several parts of the composition?

*Phaedr.* You have too good an opinion of me if you think that I have any such insight into his principles of composition.

*Soc.* At any rate, you will allow that every discourse ought to be a living creature, having a body of its own and a head and feet; there should be a middle, beginning, and end, adapted to one another and to the whole?

*Phaedr.* Certainly.

*Soc.* Can this be said of the discourse of Lysias? See whether you can find any more connection in his words than in the epitaph which is said by some to have been inscribed on the grave of Midas the Phrygian.

*Phaedr.* What is there remarkable in the epitaph?

*Soc.* It is as follows:

> I am a maiden of bronze and lie on the tomb of Midas;
> So long as water flows and tall trees grow,
> So long here on this spot by his sad tomb abiding,
> I shall declare to passers-by that Midas sleeps below.

Now in this rhyme whether a line comes first or comes last, as you will perceive, makes no difference.

*Phaedr.* You are making fun of that oration of ours.

*Soc.* Well, I will say no more about your friend's speech lest I should give offence to you; although I think that it might furnish many other examples of what a man

ought rather to avoid. But I will proceed to the other speech, which, as I think, is also suggestive to students of rhetoric. . . .

I mean to say that the composition was mostly playful. Yet in these chance fancies of the hour were involved two principles of which we should be too glad to have a clearer description if art could give us one.

*Phaedr.* What are they?

*Soc.* First, the comprehension of scattered particulars in one idea; as in our definition of love, which, whether true or false, certainly gave clearness and consistency to the discourse, the speaker should define his several notions, and so make his meaning clear.

*Phaedr.* What is the other principle, Socrates?

*Soc.* The second principle is that of division into species according to the natural formation, where the joint is, not breaking any part as a bad carver might. Just as our two discourses alike assumed, first of all, a single form of unreason; and then, as the body which from being one becomes double and may be divided into a left side and right side, each having parts right and left of the same name — after this manner the speaker proceeded to divide the parts of the left side, and did not desist until he found in them an evil or left-handed love which he justly reviled; and the other discourse, leading us to the madness which lay on the right side, found another love, also having the same name, but divine, which the speaker held up before us and applauded and affirmed to be the author of the greatest benefits.

*Phaedr.* Most true.

*Soc.* I am myself a great lover of these processes of division and generalization; they help me to speak and

to think. And if I find any man who is able to see 'a One and Many' in nature, him I follow, and 'walk in his footsteps as if he were a god.'[1]

## X. THE METHOD OF AGATHON IN THE *SYMPOSIUM* OF PLATO

Very good, Phaedrus, said Agathon. . . . Let me say first how I ought to speak, and then speak:

The previous speakers, instead of praising the god Love, or unfolding his nature, appear to have congratulated mankind on the benefits which he confers upon them. But I would rather praise the god first, and then speak of his gifts; this is always the right way of praising everything. May I say, without impiety or offence, that of all the blessed gods he is the most blessed, because he is the fairest and best? . . . And not only is he just, but exceedingly temperate. . . . As to courage, even the God of War is no match for him; . . . but I have yet to speak of his wisdom. . . . In the first place, he is a poet, . . . and he is also the source of poesy in others, which he could not be if he were not himself a poet. And at the touch of him every one becomes a poet, even though he had no music in him before; this also is a proof that Love is a good poet, and accomplished in all the fine arts; for no one can give to another that which he has not himself, or teach that of which he has no knowledge. Who will deny that the creation of animals is his doing? Are they not all the works of his wisdom, born and begotten of him? And as to the artists, do we not know that

[1] Plato, *Phaedrus* (tr. Jowett).

he only of them whom love inspires has the light of fame? — he whom Love touches not walks in darkness. The arts of medicine and archery and divination were discovered by Apollo, under the guidance of love and desire; so that he too is a disciple of Love. Also the melody of the Muses, the metallurgy of Hephaestus, the weaving of Athene, the empire of Zeus over gods and men, are all due to Love, who was the inventor of them. And so Love set in order the empire of the gods — the love of beauty, as is evident, for with deformity Love has no concern. In the days of old, . . . dreadful deeds were done among the gods, for they were ruled by Necessity; but now, since the birth of Love, and from the Love of the beautiful, has sprung every good in heaven and earth. Therefore, Phaedrus, I say of Love that he is the fairest and best in himself, and the cause of what is fairest and best in all other things.[1]

## XI. DIOTIMA EXPLAINS THE METHOD OF ARTISTIC EDUCATION TO SOCRATES

['He who would be truly initiated should pass from the concrete to the abstract, from the individual to the universal, from the universal to the universe of truth and beauty.' — Jowett.]

*Diotima*. . . . These are the lesser mysteries of love, into which even you, Socrates, may enter; to the greater and more hidden ones which are the crown of these, and to which, if you pursue them in a right spirit, they will lead, I know not whether you will be able to attain. But I will do my utmost to inform you, and do you follow if you can.

[1] Plato, *Symposium* (tr. Jowett).

For he who would proceed aright in this matter should begin in youth to visit beautiful forms; and first, if he be guided by his instructor aright, to love one such form only — out of that he should create fair thoughts; and soon he will of himself perceive that the beauty of one form is akin to the beauty of another; and then, if beauty of form in general is his pursuit, how foolish would he be not to recognize that the beauty in every form is one and the same! And when he perceives this, he will abate his violent love of the one, which he will despise and deem a small thing, and will become a lover of all beautiful forms; in the next stage he will consider that the beauty of the mind is more honorable than the beauty of the outward form. So that if a virtuous soul have but a little comeliness, he will be content to love and tend him, and will search out and bring to the birth thoughts which may improve the young, until he is compelled to contemplate and see the beauty of institutions and laws, and to understand that the beauty of them all is of one family, and that personal beauty is a trifle; and after laws and institutions he will go on to the sciences, that he may see their beauty, being not, like a servant, in love with the beauty of one youth or man or institution, himself a slave, mean and narrow-minded, but drawing towards and contemplating the vast sea of beauty, he will create many fair and noble thoughts and notions in boundless love of wisdom; until on that shore he grows and waxes strong, and at last the vision is revealed to him of a single science, which is the science of beauty everywhere. . . .

He who has been instructed thus far in the things of love, and who has learned to see the beautiful in due

order and succession, when he comes toward the end will suddenly perceive a nature of wondrous beauty (and this, Socrates, is the final cause of all our former toils) — a nature which in the first place is everlasting, not growing and decaying, or waxing and waning; secondly, not fair in one point of view and foul in another, or at one time or in one relation or at one place fair, at another time or in another relation or at another place foul, as if fair to some and foul to others, or in the likeness of a face or hands or any other part of the bodily frame, or in any form of speech or knowledge, or existing in any other being, as for example, in an animal, or in heaven, or in earth, or in any other place; but beauty absolute, separate, simple, and everlasting, which without diminution and without increase, or any change, is imparted to the ever-growing and perishing beauties of all other things. He who, from these ascending under the influence of true love, begins to perceive that beauty, is not far from the end. And the true order of going, or being led by another, to the things of love is to begin from the beauties of earth, and mount upwards for the sake of that other beauty, using these as steps only, and from one going on to two, and from two to all fair forms, and from fair forms to fair practices, and from fair practices to fair notions, until from fair notions he arrives at the notion of absolute beauty, and at last knows what the essence of beauty is.[1]

[1] Plato, *Symposium*. *The Dialogues of Plato* (tr. Jowett), New York, Oxford University Press, 1892, 1. 472–475, 564–567, 580–582. By permission,

## XII. WORDSWORTH ON LOVE AND REASON

This spiritual love acts not nor can exist
Without imagination, which, in truth,
Is but another name for absolute power
And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,
And reason in her most exalted mood.
This faculty hath been the feeding source
Of our long labor . . .

Imagination having been our theme,
So also hath that intellectual love,
For they are each in each, and cannot stand
Dividually.[1]

## XIII. THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER OF FIRST CORINTHIANS

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not love, I am become as sounding brass, or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not love, it profiteth me nothing. Love suffereth long, and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

[1] *Prelude* 14. 188–194, 206–209.

beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Love never faileth. But whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away; for we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror,[1] darkly; but then face to face. Now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known. And now abideth faith, hope, and love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

[1] That is, in a mirror of burnished metal.

# INDEX OF EXTRACTS AND ILLUSTRATIONS


Agassiz, Shaler on the Method of, 27
Agathon, the Method of, in the *Symposium* of Plato, 219
Aristotle and Method, John Burnet on, 2
Art equals Method [Lane Cooper], 2

Balzac [Gautier on], 92
Boeckh, August, on Interpretation and Criticism, 45
Boeckh, Professor Cook's Adaptation of, 46
Boeckh on the Relation of Encyclopaedia to Methodology, 49
Brewer, John Sherren, The Method of [Henry Wace], 34
Browning [*Saul* 17. 1–5], 187
Burnet, John, on Aristotle and Method, 2
Burns, Robert, Minto on, 132
Byron's Early Reading, 155

Coleridge, Gilman on, 81
Coleridge [on *Christabel*], 81
Cook, Professor [Albert S.], Adaptation of Boeckh, 46
Cox, Kenyon, on Design in Painting, 18

Dante, A Method of Study suggested by the Practice of, 195
[Dante.] On the Structure of the *Vita Nuova* [Norton], 198
Dante, Some of the Topics discussed by, in his Treatise *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, 203
De Quincey [Lane Cooper on], 83
Design in Painting, Kenyon Cox on, 18
Diotima explains the Method of Artistic Education to Socrates [from the *Symposium* of Plato], 220
Discipline, Milton on, 1

First Corinthians, The Thirteenth Chapter of, 223

Gillies, R. P., Wordsworth to, 57
Gilman on Coleridge, 81
Glance at Wordsworth's Reading, A [Lane Cooper], 96

Hamilton, William Rowan, Wordsworth to, 57, 59, 62
Hearn, Lafcadio [Elizabeth Bisland on], 90
Herbert, George, *Love Unknown*, 213
Herbert, George, The Method of [Palmer, and Allen], 208
Horace [*Ars Poetica*, 289–294], 76
Hunt, Leigh, on Reconstructing the Spirit of the Past, 44

Illustration of Shakespeare's Use of Books, An [Lane Cooper], 170
Interpretation and Criticism, August Boeckh on, 45

Johnson, Samuel [from Boswell], 79
Jonson, Ben, on Shakespeare, 76
Jonson, Ben, on Style, 77
Jowett [on the sermons of], 92

Lamb, Charles [on composition], 85
Leonardo da Vinci on Method in the Art of Painting, 14
Lockwood, Professor [Laura E.], on Milton's Corrections of the Minor Poems, 63
Lonsdale, Lord, Wordsworth to, 62
Love and Reason, Wordsworth on, 223
*Love Unknown*, George Herbert, 213

Manzoni [the *Nation* on], 85
Method in the Art of Painting, Leonardo da Vinci on, 14
Method of Agassiz, Shaler on the, 27
Method of Agathon in the *Symposium* of Plato, The, 219
Method of Artistic Education, Diotima explains the [from the *Symposium* of Plato], 220
Method of George Herbert, The [Palmer, and Allen], 208
Method of John Sherren Brewer, The [Henry Wace], 34
Method of Petrarch, The [Foscalo], 204
Method of Study suggested by the Practice of Dante, A, 195
Method of the Troubadours, The [Justin H. Smith], 187
Method, Sir Joshua Reynolds on, 16
Methodology, Boeckh on the Relation of Encyclopaedia to, 49
Methodology, Shedd on, 4
Methods and Aims in the Study of Literature: Opinions from two Poets [Lane Cooper], 52
Milton on Discipline, 1
Milton's Account of his own Education, 179
Milton's Corrections of the Minor Poems, Professor Lockwood on, 63
Milton's Plans and Studies for *Paradise Lost* [Masson], 171
Minto on Robert Burns, 132
Newman, Cardinal [on composition], 84

*Paradise Lost*, Milton's Plans and Studies for [Masson], 171
Personality and Method, Sir Frederick Pollock on, 26
Petrarch, the Method of [Foscalo], 204
[Plato.] Diotima explains the Method of Artistic Education to Socrates, 220
[Plato.] Socrates on the Principles of Composition, 216
[Plato.] The Method of Agathon in the *Symposium*, 219
Pollock, Sir Frederick, on Personality and Method, 26
Principles of Composition, Socrates on the [from the *Phaedrus* of Plato], 216

Reconstructing the Spirit of the Past, Leigh Hunt on, 44
Relation of Art to Science, Herbert Spencer on the, 8
Relation of Encyclopaedia to Methodology, Boeckh on the, 49
Reynolds, Sir Joshua, on Method, 16
Rousseau [from the *Confessions*], 80

Shakespeare, Ben Jonson on, 76
Shakespeare's Books [H. R. D. Anders], 164
Shakespeare's Use of Books, An Illustration of [Lane Cooper], 170
Shaler on the Method of Agassiz, 27
Shedd on Methodology, 4
Socrates on the Principles of Composition [from the *Phaedrus* of Plato], 216
Spencer, Herbert, on the Relation of Art to Science, 8
Spenser's Use of Books [Ida Langdon], 158
Stevenson [Chalmers on], 87

Structure of the *Vita Nuova*, On the [Norton], 198
Study of Literature, Methods and Aims in the — Opinions from two Poets [Lane Cooper], 52
Style, Ben Jonson on, 77
*Symposium* of Plato, the Method of Agathon in the, 219

Tennyson [Allingham on], 86
Thirteenth Chapter of First Corinthians, The, 223
Troubadours, The Method of the [Justin H. Smith], 187

*Vita Nuova*, On the Structure of the [Norton], 198
*Vulgari Eloquentia, De*, Some of the Topics discussed by Dante in his Treatise, 203

Wordsworth, as seen by his Sister, 82
Wordsworth on Love and Reason, 223
Wordsworth's Reading, A Glance at [Lane Cooper], 96
Wordsworth to Lord Lonsdale, 62
Wordsworth to R. P. Gillies, 57
Wordsworth to William Rowan Hamilton, 57, 59, 62

# INDEX OF PROPER NAMES

[Titles of books, articles, and poems are included, and the names of authors; but when an author is the subject of a selection, only the first reference is specified for that selection; names of places are omitted, as are also, with a few exceptions, names of fictitious persons in poems and the like.]


*Abba Thule*, Bowles', 124
*Academy, The*, 105 n.
*Account of Denmark as it was in 1692, An*, 110
*Account of Switzerland*, Bianchi's, 110
*Account of the Kingdom of Hungary*, 110
*Account of Voyages to the South and North, by Sir John Narborough and others*, 111
Adams, (? Clement), 157
Adams, Miss, 79
Addison, 136
Adolphus, 155
*Advancement of Learning*, Bacon's, 5 n.
Aeschylus, 106
Aesop, 169
*Affliction of Margaret* ——, *The*, Wordsworth's, 116
Agassiz, Louis, 27 ff.
Agathon, 219
Ainslie, Robert, 151
Akenside, 141
Alberoni, 155
Allen, A. V. G., 213 n.
Allingham, William, 87 n.
*American War*, Andrews', 157
*Ancient and Modern Letters*, Cooper's, 171 n.
*Ancient History*, Rollin's, 155
*Ancient Mariner, The Rime of the*, Coleridge's, 108, 121, 122
Anders, H. R. D., 169 n.
Anderson, 157
Andreini, 175
Andrews, 157
Angelo, Michael, 7
*Anima Poetae*, Coleridge's, 117 n.
Anne, Countess of Winchelsea, 105
Anne, Queen, 122, 126, 135
*Antiquities*, Potter's, 155
*Antony and Cleopatra*, Shakespeare's, 170, 170 n.
Apocalypse, the, 178
*Apology for Idlers, An*, Stevenson's, 89
*Apology for Smectymnuus, An*, Milton's, 186 n.
*Arcades*, Milton's, 68, 69, 71, 73
Ariosto, 162, 178
Aristotle, 2, 3, 4, 4 n., 35, 163
Armour, Jean, 145
Arnaut Daniel, 188, 189, 190, 194
Arnold, Matthew, 151
Arrian, 155
*Ars Poetica*, Horace's, 76 n.
*Atala*, Chateaubriand's, 125
*Athenaeum, The*, 109 n., 110 n., 119, 119 n., 123 n., 124 n.
*Atlantic Monthly, The*, 99, 213 n.
*Atlas, The*, 155
Augustus Caesar, 77
*Auld Lang Syne*, Burns', 142, 144
Austin, 158
Aynard, Joseph, 107

Bach, 189
Bacon, 5, 5 n., 35, 41, 157
Balboa, 125
Balzac, 92 ff.
*Balzac, Honoré de*, Gautier's, 95 n.
Bartram, William, 110, 115, 116, 119, 120, 120 n., 123, 124, 125
Basanier, 110
Baudelaire, 88
Baynes, T. S., 168, 169
Beatrice, Dante's, 184, 200
Beattie, 157
Bede, 161
Bédier, Joseph, 125, 125 n.
*Belisaire*, 157
Belsham, 155
Berkeley, 157
Bianchi, 110
Bible, the, 137, 151, 160, 167, 177, 178
*Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge's, 54 n.
Bion, 163
Bisland, Elizabeth, 91 n.
Bisset, 155
Blackstone, 157
Blair, 158
*Blind Highland Boy, The*, Wordsworth's, 117
Boeckh, August, 17 n., 45, 46, 46 n., 49, 52 n.
Boethius, Hector, 155
Bolingbroke, 157
Bonaparte, 157
Bonnard, 157
*Book of Snobs, The*, Thackeray's, 88
Boswell, 79, 79 n.
Bowles, 105, 124, 124 n.
Bowyer, James, 53
Bradley, A. C., 64, 64 n.
Brandes, Georg, 97, 98
*Brani inediti dei Promessi Sposi*, 85, 86
Brewer, John Sherren, 34 ff., 43 n.
*British Nepos*, 157
*British Plutarch*, 157
Browne, Sir Thomas, 88
Browning, 187
Bruce, James, 111, 113, 123, 124, 157
Buchanan, George, 155, 160
Buchanan, Rev. J. L., 110
Burke, 47, 48
Burnet, Gilbert, 110
Burnet, John, 2, 4 n.
Burns, 132 ff., 164, 190
Busbequius, 110
Byron, 100, 125, 153, 155
*Byron, Life of*, Moore's, 158 n.

Caesar, Julius, 155, 157
Callimachus, 160
Calvert, 104
Cambridge, 157
Camden, 160, 164
Camoens, 124
Campbell, J. Dykes, 108 n., 123 n., 124 n.
Campbell, John, 157
Campion, 209
Candolle, De, 6
Cantemir, Prince, 156
Carlyle, 133, 137, 138, 148, 153
Carr, 170 n.
Carver, Jonathan, 109, 116, 116 n., 123, 125
Casella, 75
Castelain, 77 n., 79 n.
Cato, 169
Catullus, 53
Cellarius, 157
Chalmers, W. P., 90 n.
Chapman, 125
*Charakteristische Eigenschaften von R. L. Stevenson's Stil*, Chalmers', 90 n.
Charles Surface, 147
*Charles the Eleventh*, Norberg's, 156
*Charles the Fifth*, Robertson's, 157
Charles the First, King, 178
Charles the Second, King, 147
Chateaubriand, 124, 125
Chaucer, 100, 104, 105, 114, 134, 163
*Chironomia*, Austin's, 158
Chopin, 189
*Christabel*, Coleridge's, 81, 81 n.
*Chronicles*, Froissart's, 155
*Church-Porch, The*, Herbert's, 210

Cicero, 53, 158, 169, 178
*Cid, The*, Corneille's, 157
*Circumcision, Upon the*, Milton's, 66, 67
*Classic Point of View, The*, Kenyon Cox's, 25
Clenard, 169
Clifford, Kingdon, 26 n.
Coleridge, E. H., 81 n., 117 n.
Coleridge, Hartley, 116
*Coleridge's Poems, Facsimile Reproduction* (ed. Campbell), 123 n.
Coleridge, S. T., 41, 53, 81, 103, 104, 107, 108, 108 n., 110, 112, 116, 117, 117 n., 120, 122, 123, 123 n., 124, 124 n.
*Collection of Voyages, Travels, and Discoveries*, Mavor's, 110
*College Sermons*, Jowett's, 92 n.
Collins, J. C., 125 n.
Collins, William, 141
*Complaint of a Forsaken Indian Woman, The*, Wordsworth's, 116
*Comus*, Milton's, 65, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73
*Confessions*, Rousseau's, 81 n., 157
*Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, De Quincey's, 83, 84
Conington, 76 n.
*Contemporary Review, The*, 87
Cook, Albert S., 46, 48 n.
Cook, Captain James, 121, 128
Cooper, Lane, 56 n., 84 n., 96 n., 132 n., 171 n.
*Corderius' Colloquies*, 169
Cortez, 125
*Cottar's Saturday Night, The*, Burns', 142
Cowper, 125
Cox, Kenyon, 18, 25 n.
Coxe, 113
Crabbe, 136
Crashaw, 211
Craven, 124
Cromwell, 157
Cuvier, 6
*Czar Peter*, Voltaire's, 156, 157

Dampier, 117
Daniel, Arnaut, 188, 189, 190, 194
Dante, 75, 178, 187, 188, 189, 190, 194, 195 ff., 197 n., 198 ff., 203
Darwin, Erasmus, 106
Davila, 156
da Vinci, Leonardo, 14, 16 n.
*Death of Isaac Newton*, Thomson's, 116
De Candolle, 6
*Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Gibbon's, 155
*Defense of Poesy*, Sidney's, 210
Defoe, 88
Demosthenes, 53, 158, 178
*Denmark as it was in 1692, An Account of*, 110
De Quincey, 83, 91
De Quiros, 124
*Description of Formosa*, Psalmanazar's, 111
*Descriptive Sketches*, Wordsworth's, 113
de Sélincourt, E., 109 n., 113 n.
*De Vulgari Eloquentia*, Dante's, 203
*Dialogues of Plato, The* (tr. Jowett), 222 n.
*Diary, A*, Allingham's, 87 n.
Diodati, John, 180
Diodorus Siculus, 160
Diotima, 220
*Discourses on Art*, Sir Joshua Reynolds', 17 n.
*Discoveries*, Ben Jonson's, 77 n., 79 n.
Dodsley, 136
Don Juan, 146
Dowden, 97, 97 n., 109 n., 117 n.
Drayton, 105
*Drink to me only*, Jonson's, 210
Drummond, 157
Dryden, 41, 105, 135
Du Bartas, 178
*Duncan Gray*, Burns', 142

Earl of Southampton, 164
*Early Life of William Wordsworth, The*, Legouis', 103 n., 108 n., 113 n., 116 n., 130 n.
Easy Club, The, 137
*Ebb Tide, The*, Stevenson's, 89

*Eclogues*, Mantuan's, 169
*Eclogues*, Virgil's, 135
*Edinburgh University Magazine, The*, 88
Edwards, Bryan, 123
Εἰκονοκλάστης, Milton's, 178
*Elegies*, Shenstone's, 151
Elizabeth, Queen, 126
Emerson, 96, 96 n.
*Émile*, Rousseau's, 130
*Encyclopädie und Methodologie*, Boeckh's, 46 n., 52 n.
*English History, On the Study of*, J. S. Brewer's, 39
*English Studies*, J. S. Brewer's, 43 n.
*English Traits*, Emerson's, 96 n.
*Epistles*, Cicero's, 169
*Epitaphium Damonis*, Milton's, 171
*Epithalamion Thamesis*, Spenser's, 159
*Essay on Criticism*, Pope's, 140, 141
*Essay on the Liberty of Unlicensed Printing*, Milton's, 150
*Essays on Education and Kindred Subjects*, Spencer's, 13 n.
*Essays on Petrarch*, Foscolo's, 208
*Ethics of Aristotle, The*, Burnet's, 4 n.
*Études Critiques*, Bédier's, 125, 125 n.
Eugene, 157
Euripides, 178
Eutropius, 155
*Excursion, The*, Wordsworth's, 115, 116, 116 n., 117, 118 n., 131, 132 n.
*Expostulation and Reply*, Wordsworth's, 98, 123

*Fables*, Aesop's, 169
*Faerie Queene, The*, Spenser's, 159, 162, 163
*Familiar Studies of Men and Books*, Stevenson's, 146
*Famous French Authors*, 95 n.
*Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth, The*, 166
*Farmer's Ingle*, Fergusson's, 142
Fergusson, 138, 139, 142, 143
Field, Barron, 105 n.
*Fifteen Discourses on Art*, Sir Joshua Reynolds', 17 n.
First Corinthians, the Thirteenth Chapter of, 223
Fletcher of Saltoun, 150
Fontenelle, 135
Forster, 124
Foscolo, Ugo, 208 n.
*Four Lives from North's Plutarch*, Carr's, 170 n.
Frederick the Second, 156
Froissart, 155
Furnivall, 169

Gautier, Théophile, 95 n., 146
Gay, 136
*Gentle Shepherd, The*, Ramsay's, 137, 138
Gibbon, 155
Gildersleeve, Basil L., 54 n.
Gilfillan, 124 n.
Gillies, John, 156
Gillies, R. P., 57
Gilman, James, 81, 81 n.
Gisborne, Thomas, 125, 125 n.
*Glance at Wordsworth's Reading, A*, Cooper's, 132 n.
Goethe, 12, 165
*Goody Blake and Harry Gill*, Wordsworth's, 106
Gordon, 155
Gospels, the, 178
Gourgues, Dominique de, 110
*Grammar*, Lily's, 169
Gray, 106, 141
*Guardian, The*, 136, 137
Guicciardini, 156
*Guide to the Lakes, Wordsworth's* (ed. E. de Sélincourt), 109 n., 113 n.
Guinicelli, Guido, 187
Gustavus Adolphus, 156
Gustavus Vasa, 156
Guthrie, 157

Hakluyt, 110
*Hallow Fair*, Fergusson's, 142
*Hallowe'en*, Burns', 142

Hamilton, William Rowan, 57, 59, 62
Harford, 7 n.
Harte, 156
Hartley, David, 107
Harvey, C., 211
Harvey, Gabriel, 159
Haterius, 77
Hawthorne, 88
Hazlitt, W. C., 99
Hazlitt, William, 88, 105
Hearn, Lafcadio, 90 ff.
Hearne, Samuel, 109, 110, 111, 116, 123
*Hebrides, Travels in the Western*, Buchanan's, 110
Hector Boethius, 155
Hengist, 165
Henry, 155
Henry the Eighth, King, 34, 35, 36, 40
*Henry the Fifth*, Shakespeare's, 166
*Henry the Fourth*, Shakespeare's, 166
Herbert, George, 105, 209, 213
Herodianus, 160
Herodotus, 155, 160
Hippocrates, 3
*Historical Relationships of Burns, The*, Minto's, 154 n.
*History, On the Study of*, J. S. Brewer's, 39
*History of Christian Doctrine*, Shedd's, 7 n.
*History of Greece*, Mitford's, 155
Hobbes, 157
Holinshed, 155, 167
Homer, 53, 125, 127, 162, 163, 178
*Homer, Treatise of*, Plutarch's, 160
Hone, 99
*Honoré de Balzac*, Gautier's, 95 n.
Hooke, 155
Hooker, 158
*Hope*, Herbert's, 212
Horace, 37, 76, 76 n., 106, 169, 178
Horsa, 165
Howell, A. G. Ferrers, 203 n.
Howell, James, 110
Howley, Archbishop, 84
*Hudson's Bay*, Hearne's, 109, 123
Humboldt, 127
Hume, 40, 155, 157
*Hungary, Account of the Kingdom of*, 110
Hunt, Leigh, 44
Hutchinson, Thomas, 96
*Hymns*, Spenser's, 163

*Idiot Boy, The*, Wordsworth's, 106
*Inland Voyage, An*, Stevenson's, 88
*Institutiones Absolutissimae*, Clenard's, 169
*Instructions for Forreine Travell*, Howell's, 110

James, Captain Thomas, 110, 123, 124
James, King, 178
*Jar of Honey from Mount Hybla, A*, Leigh Hunt's, 44 n., 45 n.
*John Anderson*, Burns', 142
Johnson, Samuel, 79, 79 n., 113, 157
*Jolly Beggars, The*, Burns', 148
*Jones, Sir William*, Teignmouth's, 157
Jonson, Ben, 76, 77, 77 n., 79 n., 147, 164, 167, 210
*Journal en Amérique*, Chateaubriand's, 125
*Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*, 83 n.
*Journey*, Hearne's, 109, 123
Jowett, 92, 219 n., 220, 220 n., 222 n.
J. S., 143
Juan, Don, 146
Junius, 83
Juvenal, 169, 178

Kaimes, 157
Keats, 100, 125
Knight, William, 57 n., 83 n., 105 n., 112 n.
*Knights of Malta*, Vertot's, 156
Knolles, 156
*Kubla Khan*, Coleridge's, 116

Lamb, 64, 64 n., 85, 85 n., 88, 99
*Lament*, Sordel's, 192
Langdon, Ida, 164 n.
Langland, 163
*Latin Works of Dante, The*, 203 n.
Laura, Petrarch's, 184, 204, 206, 207, 208
Lawes, Henry, 75
*Laws of Love, The*, 191
*Lectures and Essays*, Kingdon Clifford's, 26 n.
Lefranc, Abel, 127
Legouis, Émile, 103, 103 n., 108, 108 n., 113 n., 116 n., 129
Leland, 155
Leonardo da Vinci, 14, 16 n.
*Letters and Correspondence of John Henry Newman*, 85 n.
*Letters of the Wordsworth Family* (ed. Knight), 57 n., 59 n., 61 n., 62 n., 101 n., 112 n.
Lewes, 12
*Leys Damors, Las*, 190, 191
*Library of the World's Best Literature*, Warner's, 54 n.
*Life and Letters of Lafcadio Hearn*, Elizabeth Bisland's, 91 n.
*Life and Works of George Herbert*, Palmer's, 208 n., 212 n.
*Life of Catherine II*, Tooke's, 156, 157
*Life of Charles Lamb*, Lucas', 85 n.
*Life of Coleridge*, Gilman's, 81 n.
*Life of Gladstone*, Morley's, 100
*Life of Gustavus Adolphus*, Harte's, 156
*Life of Johnson*, Boswell's, 79 n.
*Life of Lord Byron*, Moore's, 158 n.
*Life of Michael Angelo*, Harford's, 7 n.
*Life of Newton*, 157
Lily, 169
Lily's *Grammar*, 169
Linnaeus, 106
*Literature of the Georgian Era*, Minto's, 154 n.
Littledale, Harold, 124 n.
*Lives of the Admirals*, Campbell's, 157
Livy, 155
Lobo, 113
Locke, 111, 157
Lockwood, Laura E., 63, 76 n.
Losh, 114
*Love's Labor's Lost*, Shakespeare's, 168
*Love Unknown*, Herbert's, 213
Lucas, E. V., 85 n.
Lucian, 160
Lucretius, 53, 163, 178
Lupton, 169
Luther, 35
*Lycidas*, Milton's, 74
*Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth's and Coleridge's, 108, 114, 121, 122, 123 n., 124
Lysias, 216, 217

Mackenzie, 149
Macpherson, 151
*Main Currents*, Brandes', 98
*Man of Feeling, The*, Mackenzie's, 149, 151
*Man of the World*, 151
Manso, 171
Mantuan, 169
Manzoni, 85, 86
Marlborough, 157
Marmontel, 157
*Masque of Alfred*, Thomson's, 151
Masson, David, 63, 178 n.
Maus, 192
Mavor, Rev. W., 110
*Maxims*, Cato's, 169
*Memoirs of Wordsworth*, Christopher Wordsworth's, 104 n., 105 n.
*Memories and Portraits*, Stevenson's, 87, 90
*Metamorphoses*, Ovid's, 169
*Metaphysics*, Aristotle's, 3
*Methodology of Academical Study*, Schelling's, 50
Mezeray, 155
Michael Angelo, 7
Midas the Phrygian, 217
Miller, Hugh, 12
Milton, 1, 2 n., 41, 53, 62, 63 ff., 96, 100, 104, 105, 114, 122, 124, 127, 150, 171 ff., 179

Milton's *Poetical Works* (ed. Masson), 178 n.
Minto, William, 114, 132, 154 n.
*Missionary, The*, Bowles', 124
Mitford, 155
*Modern Language Notes*, 127, 132 n.
*Modern Painters*, Ruskin's, 129
Molina, 113, 124
Montaigne, 88
Montesquieu, 157
Moore, Dr., 143
Moore, Thomas, 155 n., 158 n.
Morley, Lord, 96, 96 n., 97, 100, 100 n., 109 n., 112 n., 115 n.
*Moses, Life of*, Stevenson's, 88
*Mouse, To a*, Burns', 148
Mozley, 85 n.
Murdoch, 151
Myers, F. W. H., 100, 100 n.

'Namby Pamby,' 136
Narborough, Sir John, 111
*Nation, The*, 86 n.
*Navigations de Pantagruel, Les*, Lefranc's, 127
Nepos, 155
*New Life, The*, Dante's (tr. Rossetti), 195 n., 197 n., 198
*New Life, The*, Dante's (tr. Norton), 202 n.
Newman, Cardinal, 84, 85 n.
Newton, 116
*Newton, Life of*, 157
*New Voyage round the World*, Dampier's, 117
*Nicomachean Ethics*, 2 n.
*Nineteenth Century, The*, 114, 114 n.
Norberg, 156
North, 170
Norton, C. E., 202 n.

Obermann, 88
*Observations made in a Journey in the Low Countries*, Ray's, 111
*Ode to Duty*, Wordsworth's, 106, 107
Odoric, 113
Oeftering, W., 118, 118 n.
Olaus Magnus, 160
*Old Mortality*, Stevenson's, 89
*On the New Forcers of Conscience*, Milton's, 75
*On the Study of English History*, J. S. Brewer's, 39
*On the Study of History*, J. S. Brewer's, 39
*On Time*, Milton's, 66
*Orations*, Cicero's, 169
Orme, 157
*Ossian*, Macpherson's, 151
Othman the First, 156
Ovid, 53, 167, 169, 178
*Oxford in the Vacation*, Lamb's, 64 n.

Paley, 157
Palissy, Bernard, 92
Palmer, G. H., 208 n., 212, 212 n., 213
*Palmer's Herbert*, Allen's, 213 n.
*Paradise Lost*, Milton's, 52, 62, 64 n., 171, 172, 173, 174, 176, 177
Park, Mungo, 124, 157
*Parliamentary Debates*, 158
*Parts of Animals*, Aristotle's, 3
*Pedlar, The*, Wordsworth's, 82, 83
Peire de Corbiac, 192
*Pelew Islands*, Wilson's, 109, 116, 124
Percy, Thomas, 122
Persius, 169, 178
*Peter Bell*, Wordsworth's, 115
Petrarch, 163, 178, 188, 189, 204
Phaedrus, 216, 219
*Phaedrus*, Plato's, 219 n.
Phidias, 17
*Philip*, Leland's, 155
Philips, Ambrose, 136
Phillips, 176
Pindar, 54 n.
Pinkerton, 128, 128 n., 157
Plato, 3, 4, 17 n., 163, 178, 185, 219
Plautus, 169
Plutarch, 155, 160, 167, 170
*Poems and Extracts chosen by William Wordsworth* (ed. Littledale), 124 n.

*Poems by Wordsworth* (ed. Dowden), 97 n., 109 n.
*Poetical Works of Coleridge* (ed. Campbell), 108 n., 123 n., 124 n.
*Poetical Works of Milton* (ed. Masson), 178 n.
*Poetical Works of Wordsworth* (ed. Dowden), 117 n.
*Poetical Works of Wordsworth* (ed. Morley), 100 n., 109 n., 112 n., 115 n., 117 n.
Pollard, Jane, 100 n.
Pollock, Sir Frederick, 26
Pope, 41, 105, 123, 128, 134, 135, 136, 140, 141, 142, 143
Porteus, 158
*Portfolio, The*, 88
Potter, 155
*Praeterita*, Ruskin's, 155 n.
*Prelude, The*, Wordsworth's, 98, 102 n., 103, 103 n., 110 n., 115, 116, 116 n., 117, 117 n., 118, 118 n., 120, 120 n., 125, 130, 130 n., 223 n.
Pre-Raphaelites, 9
*Principal Navigations*, Hakluyt's, 110
*Promessi Sposi, I, Unpublished Passages from*, 85
Prophets, the, 178
*Prose Poetry of Thomas De Quincey, The*, Cooper's, 84
*Protagoras*, Plato's, 3
Psalmanazar, 111
Psalms, the, 178
*Pueriles Confabulatiunculae*, 169
Purchas, Samuel, 110
*Purchas his Pilgrimage*, 110, 116

*Queen and Huntress*, Jonson's, 210
Quintilian, 158
Quiros, De, 124

Rabelais, 127, 127 n.
Rab the Ranter, 147
Raleigh, Professor, 97, 97 n., 101, 109
Raleigh, Sir Walter, 162
*Rambler, The*, 79, 158
Ramsay, Allan, 137, 138, 139, 142, 147
Raphael, 25
Rapin, 155
*Rasselas*, Johnson's, 113 n.
Ray, John, 111
Raymond, 113
*Reason of Church Government, The*, Milton's, 2 n., 183
*Recluse, The*, Wordsworth's, 114, 115
*Rerum Scoticarum Historia*, Buchanan's, 160
*Revue Germanique*, 107
Reynolds, Joshua, 16, 17 n.
Reynolds, Myra, 125, 125 n., 128
Rigaud, John Francis, 16 n.
*Rime of the Ancient Mariner, The*, Coleridge's, 108, 121, 122
Ritter, Karl, 127
*Roads*, Stevenson's, 88
Robertson, 157
Robinson, Crabb, 104
Roderick Random, 147
Rollin, 155
Rossetti, 195 n., 197 n.
Rousseau, 80, 81 n., 119, 129, 130, 157
Rudolph of Hapsburg, 156
Ruskin, 9, 74, 155
*Ruth*, Wordsworth's, 83, 115, 116, 125
Rycaut, Sir Paul, 156

Sallust, 155, 157
*Saul*, Browning's, 187 n.
Scaliger, 161
Schelling, 30, 50
Schiller, 156
*Scots wha hae*, Burns', 142
Scott, 157
*Seaside Studies*, Lewes', 12
*Seasons, The*, Thomson's, 52
*Second Defense*, Milton's, 180 n.
Sélincourt, De, 109 n., 113 n.
Seneca, 169
*Sententiae Pueriles*, 169
*Sentimental Journey*, Sterne's, 149, 151
Sforza, Francesco, 85, 86

Shakespeare, 40, 53, 59, 76, 96, 100, 104, 105, 106, 114, 124, 127, 134, 147, 164 ff., 170, 178, 209
*Shakespearean Tragedy*, A. C. Bradley's, 64 n.
*Shakespeare's Books*, Anders', 169 n.
Shaler, N. S., 27, 34 n.
Shaw, 124
Shedd, 4
Shelley, 100
Shelvocke, 108, 110, 117, 123
*Shelvocke's Voyages*, 108
Shenstone, 141, 151
*Shepheardes Calender*, Spenser's, 163
*Shepherd's Week*, Gay's, 137
Sheridan, 158
*She was a Phantom of Delight*, Wordsworth's, 115
Sidney, 209, 210
Simpson, Mrs., 83
*Sir William Jones*, Teignmouth's, 157
Smith, Justin H., 194 n.
Smith, Nowell, 52 n., 53 n.
Smollett, 155
Socrates, 216, 220
*Solemn Music, At a*, Milton's, 68, 69, 71, 72, 73
Solinus, 160
Sonnets, Milton's, 66, 66 n., 75
Sordel, 192
Southampton, Earl of, 164
*South Atlantic Quarterly, The*, 171 n.
Southey, 117, 124, 125, 157
*South Sea Letters, The*, Stevenson's, 89
*Spectator, The*, 158
*Speech on Conciliation*, Burke's, 48, 48 n.
Spencer, Herbert, 8, 13 n.
Spenser, Edmund, 100, 104, 105, 106, 114, 122, 158 ff., 178
*Spenser's Theory of Fine Art*, Langdon's, 164 n.
*Spirit of Discovery by Sea, The*, Bowles', 124
*Spirit of the Age, The*, Hazlitt's, 105
*Standard Dictionary*, 2, 129
Stanihurst, 161
*Stanzas written in my Pocket-Copy of Thomson's 'Castle of Indolence,'* Wordsworth's, 115
Steele, 136, 137
Sterne, 149, 151
Stevenson, R. L., 87 ff., 146
Stothard, 124
Strabo, 157, 161
*Strange and Dangerous Voyage*, James', 110, 124
*Studies in Literature*, Morley's, 96 n., 100 n.
*Studies in Poetry and Criticism*, Collins', 125 n.
Surface, Charles, 147
*Switzerland, Account of*, Bianchi's, 110
Sylvester, 178
*Symposium, The*, Plato's, 17 n., 219, 220 n., 222 n.

*Tables Turned, The*, Wordsworth's, 98
Tacitus, 155
*Tam Glen*, Burns', 142
*Tam o' Shanter*, Burns', 142, 148
Tangralopi, 156
Tasso, 162, 163, 178, 188
Teignmouth, 157
Tekeli, 157
Tennyson, 86, 89, 96
Terence, 53, 169
Theocritus, 53, 106, 136, 163
*There was a Boy*, Wordsworth's, 115
Thiebault, 156
*Thirty Years' War*, Schiller's, 156
Thomson, James, 105, 116, 141, 151
Thomson, Mrs., 75
*Thorn, The*, Wordsworth's, 117
*Three Bonnets, The*, Ramsay's, 142
Thucydides, 155
Tillotson, 158
Tindal, 155
*To a Mouse*, Burns', 148
Tobin, James, 114
Tom Jones, 147

Tooke, 156
*Toxaris*, Lucian's, 160
*Tragedies*, Seneca's, 169
Traherne, 211
*Transactions of the Wordsworth Society*, 111 n.
*Travels*, Bartram's, 119 n., 123
*Travels*, Carver's, 109
*Travels in Divers Parts of Europe*, 111
*Travels in France, Italy, Germany, and Switzerland*, Gilbert Burnet's, 110
*Travels in the Western Hebrides*, Buchanan's, 110
*Travels into Turkey*, Busbequius', 110
*Travels to Discover the Sources of the Nile*, Bruce's, 111, 123
*Treasure Island*, Stevenson's, 89
*Treatise of Homer*, Plutarch's, 160
*Treatise on Painting, A*, Leonardo da Vinci's, 16 n.
*Treatment of Nature in English Poetry, The*, Reynolds', 125, 126 n.
*Troubadours at Home*, Justin H. Smith's, 194 n.
*Turkey, Travels into*, Busbequius', 110
Tutin, J. R., 118
*Twa Books*, Ramsay's, 142
*Twa Dogs, The*, Burns', 142

*Unlicensed Printing, Essay on the Liberty of*, Milton's, 150
*Unpublished Passages from I Promessi Sposi*, 85
*Upon the Circumcision*, Milton's, 66, 67

*Vailima Letters*, Stevenson's, 89
Vasa, Gustavus, 156
Vaughan, 211
Veronese, 25
Vertot, 155
Vinci, Leonardo da, 14, 16 n.
Virgil, 53, 106, 135, 136, 160, 161, 162, 163, 169, 178
*Visions*, Spenser's, 163
*Vita Nuova*, Dante's, 195 n., 197 n., 198, 202 n.
*Vocabulary of Sea Phrases*, 111
Voltaire, 155, 156
Vondel, 175
*Voyages and Travels* (1744), 111
*Voyages and Travels*, Pinkerton's, 128 n.
*Voyage round the World, A*, Shelvocke's, 108 n.
*Voyages to the South and North, by Sir John Narborough and others, Account of*, 111
*Voyages, Travels, and Discoveries, Collection of*, Mavor's, 110
*Vulgari Eloquentia, De*, Dante's, 203

Wace, Henry, 43 n.
*Walks in a Forest*, Gisborne's, 125 n.
Wallace, 86
*Wallenstein* (tr. Coleridge), 107
Walsh, William, 135, 136, 140
'Wanderer, The,' Wordsworth's, 117
Wartons, the, 141
Waverley Novels, 89
Wenceslaus, 156
*West Indies*, Bryan Edwards', 123
*What Knowledge is of most Worth*, Spencer's, 13 n.
Wilson, 109, 116
Winchelsea, Anne, Countess of, 105
*Windsor Forest*, Pope's, 136
*Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare's, 168
Wolsey, 36
Wordsworth, Christopher, 104 n.
Wordsworth, Dorothy, 83 n., 101 n., 112
Wordsworth, John, 117
Wordsworth, William, 52, 52 n., 53 n., 54, 55, 55 n., 56 n., 57, 59, 62, 82, 88, 96 ff., 110 ff., 136, 153, 160, 163, 223
*Wordsworth and Barron Field*, Knight's, 105 n.

*Wordsworth Dictionary*, Tutin's, 118
*Wordsworth's Great Failure*, Minto's, 114 n.
*Wordsworth's Literary Criticism* (ed. Nowell Smith), 52 n., 53 n., 55 n., 56 n.
*Wordsworth's und Byron's Natur-Dichtung*, Oeftering's, 118 n.
*World, The*, 158
Wrangham, Archdeacon, 111
Wright, William Aldis, 63, 64 n.

Xenophon, 155, 185

*Ye Banks and Braes*, Burns', 142
Young, 151

Zarco, 124
*Zoönomia*, Erasmus Darwin's, 106

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